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MIRIAM'S MARRIAGE.

MIRIAM'S MARRIAGE.

BY

KATHARINE S. MACQUOID,

AUTHOR OF "PATTY," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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DEDICATION.

TO

My Children.

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MIRIAM'S MARRIAGE.

PRELUDE.

THE town of Shallerton ends as abruptly as some books do.

The last houses have a look about them as though they had meant to go on into a long street of whitewashed, slated uniformity, but had checked themselves on the brow of the slope.

Possibly they stopped and drew breath at sight of the hills and vallies and richly wooded bits before them; — hills rising

behind one another, each vying with his neighbour in complexion, some with a faint glimmer of green already powdering the brown earth, others bare of all but furrows, with leafless hedges set atop of the low piled granite fences; others again of the dark velvet tint which ever so far off tells of stretches of waste given up to gorse and bramble. Behind these are ash woods and nut coppices, showing their skeleton tracery here and there. Suddenly, rising above the hills — stern and dark against the sky — are the granite tors of rugged uncouth form, suggesting idol-worship and Druid cruelty, and all the hideousness which we associate with Paganism.

But on the left, just below the slope, the doctor's house, a granite building white-washed, has profited by the sudden break; it has a couple of meadows sloping down the hill till they reach the brook below.

This brook runs under the road which crosses over a quaint arch of grey granite blocks; dried fern stems peep between crevices in them, and no doubt will soon show themselves along the banks of the clear water below—so clear that the many coloured pebbles shine like jewels through its transparent brown light.

The brook divides the doctor's meadows from the grey sheds of the wheelwright's yard; on the opposite side of the way the ground runs to picturesque waste, broken up with gorse and brambles clustering over huge grey stones, and here and there, on some rising fragments, a group of pine-trees.

Just facing the wheelwright's cottage is the hand-post to Dinton, and a road has been cut here straight across the moor—that is, straight until the hills rise up from it and force it aside to skirt them.

The moor seems unused to the innova-

tion of a road and shrugs up great bare brown shoulders, without so much as a blade of grass peeping over from the waste above.

But instead of following the road so newly made across Dinton moor, go on past the entrance of the wheelwright's yard, past the low-browed thatched cottage, where Matthew Blane, the owner of yard and cottage, leans against the garden gate smoking his afternoon pipe.

Matthew's mild grey eyes are fixed on the way across the moor, but do not stay to look at him; follow the road beyond the cottage: there is nothing to notice here but high hedges, brown now in November, except for ferns peeping through the loosely piled stone banks beneath the hedges; go on to the next hand-post, and on the left of this down a sharp sudden descent you come upon a small grey school-house.

The mistress is talking to two of her scholars in the open door-way. There is nothing special about her. She looks very neat, very quiet and common-place; there is nothing extraordinary in Miss Denton, and there is nothing ordinary about the children to whom she speaks. They are girls: the elder, about twelve, has a face of that exquisite fair beauty we like to call specially English; her black hat and red cloak go well with this flower-like loveliness, and are put on with a precision rivalling the arrangement of the mistress's collar and cuffs. It is on the contrast afforded in this respect by the girl's young sister that Miss Denton, the school-mistress, now holds forth in a short chopping fashion. Miss Denton is a certificated school-teacher, and esteems herself accordingly.

"So difficult, Nancy, to think that your hat and cloak are no older than your

sister's; there is as much purple as scarlet in it with the stains; and look at your hair; dear me, child, how am I to improve you, eh? Why can't you imitate Miriam?"

Nancy heaves an impatient sigh. She is as unlike Miriam as if she had come of another stock. Her eyes are large lustreless grey, instead of soft porcelain blue, and they do not suit her pale dark skin. She has a wide mouth, too, and an irregular unsettled nose, about the future proportions of which you feel as uncertain as you do of the result of your seedling picotees. Then Nancy's dark hair straggles over her eyes and shows beneath her limp hat in tangled roughness—very unlike Miriam's glossy golden curls, as smooth and bright as when she came to school.

"Why can't you take example from Miriam, child?" the mistress repeated.

Nancy looked up in her querist's face, and then she looked at Miriam; her sigh prolonged itself into a groan.

"Oh, it is such a bother to be always fiddling over yourself and smoothing yourself, and looking in the glass — and besides——"

"There, hush—I don't like excuses, Nancy Blane, still less do I like reflections on others. I am perfectly satisfied with Miriam; you had far better take pattern by her than find fault, my dear. Now go home and let me see you neater—less rough-looking to-morrow, Nancy."

Miss Denton looked at her watch and the children turned away; Miriam a little elated by the mistress's praise; but then praise was the daily food of the pretty smiling sweet-tempered girl whom no one had ever had cause to blame since her birth. Too much sugar in one's cup may induce

acidity, still while life is fresh and young, and nothing has as yet staled on the senses, we are apt to be that which we are called.

Nancy swung her school-bag backwards and forwards as she walked on. She looked almost ugly when she set her firm chin and frowned. The bag struck her sister's arm and Miriam started.

"Goodness, Nancy—you *are* careless—you hurt."

"Oh, don't *you* go preaching. You might ha' spoke up for me just now if you'd ha' chose, Miriam. You knew why I was extra rough-looking, that you did fast enough."

A flush came in Miriam's beautiful little face. Just then she looked the colour of a rosy sea-shell.

"Oh, you mean because you'd helped Daniel out of the pond. Well, I didn't

think on it, Nancy. I was thinkin' of somethin' else, and besides, it isn't right to interrupt Miss Denton."

"Bother Miss Denton—bother tidiness—bother everybody and everything." Nancy swung her bag again vehemently; then grew scarlet with rage, and, finally, as Miriam gave no provocation for any further outbreak, ran off home.

Matthew Blane was still smoking his pipe—still gazing over the way across the common. In reality he was tall, but he stooped till he looked like a man of middle height; it was from him that Nancy got her clear colourless eyes, but the rest of him was more like Miriam; he was fair-complexioned still, with the golden hue of a skin which has not reddened by constant exposure. Matthew's hair had bleached early, it had begun to change when his eyes took that far-off seeking

look into them, when he lost his fair young wife in Nancy's baby days.

His sister, Rizpah, had come to him then to guide his house and his children, but something in her guidance had disagreed with Nancy's temper, and after many struggles for peace, the brother and sister had agreed to part till "such time as Nancy had grown more tractable."

Matthew was a kind and loving father, but he had not much power of revealing affection. Miriam had the pretty petting ways so winning in a child, and she got far more outward tokens of affection from the wheelwright than Nancy did. Poor Nancy! sometimes in the overflow of her warm up-springing fondness, she would jump upon those she loved with the awkward troublesome demonstrativeness of a puppy, and would get much about the same repulse. In some ways she was receiving

the training rather of a boy than that of a girl; even Miriam at times would ask her to be less rough.

"It's all along of having lost mother," the child murmured, when she thought over her troubles. "Mother wouldn't have minded her cap being set crooked like Mrs. Purton do, and mother wouldn't neither have had a pipe in her mouth, so I couldn't have knocked it out, like I do when I try to kiss father."

But this evening Nancy was too much ruffled for any sort of greeting.

Matthew took his pipe from his lips and looked after her as he saw her running past.

"Eh, my little maid, where's Miriam, eh? How is it ye be home soonest?"

Something in the gentle placid voice forced a shaming contrast to the unregulated trouble within Nancy's heart—it was like a shower on a parched August evening.

She crept back quietly and nestled her hot red face into her father's hand.

He patted her cheek—then he held up her little square chin in his large hand, and looked down into her face—he sighed at what he saw there.

Nancy heard the sigh, knew it was for her, and yet, though her sore heart melted, she hardened herself outwardly.

If she could only get the chance she knew she could do something really worth doing as well as Miriam, or even Miss Denton could, and wasn't it better to do great things than little things; but then there was no use in telling anybody these thoughts.

"What's been vexing ye, little maid; is it the sewing or the tasks to-day?"

Nancy looked up in keen impatience; she invariably got a bad mark for writing, but her tasks never caused her trouble;

she hated needle-work, but chiefly from the necessity for clean hands and orderly ways it brought along with it.

"Tasks are no trouble," she said, in a cross voice, "and I got a mark for sewing."

Matthew sighed again. He knew well enough something was amiss with that little struggling soul; but he had no more idea how to get to it than he would have had how to walk over the brook when the dark-brown waters came flooding down from the hills as they did sometimes, and tumbled the stepping-stones one over another in their headlong course.

Yet he tried to understand and soothe the child.

"Could ye mind to be gentle, my maid;" his fingers patted the hot face again, and got wetted by fast springing tears. "Gentle ways be best—quickest in the end—though they seem slow to begin with."

Matthew had made a great effort to say as much as this, but being a man, it did not occur to him to end it by a kiss; and when Nancy slipped from his hand, after rubbing her lips against it in the action, he felt relieved.

As she went into the house Miriam reached the gate and held up her bonny face.

"Ah my bird"—he bent down and kissed her—"when I see you and Nancy it makes my heart heavy at thinking of the little master yonder"—he looked across the common—"with no father left to guide him."

"Is Mrs. Hugh Llewellyn going away?" asked Miriam.

"I haven't heard; but the new parson 'ull be safe to want the Rectory house. I had to go over there this morning, and little master he stayed about me while I

saw what was to do. Nurse came too, and she says it will be a fine thing if Master Hugh's uncle, Mr. Godfrey, takes to him; but I'm not so sure, I told nurse an uncle were not the same as a father."

"I didn't know old Mrs. Llewellyn had any more sons than Mr. Hugh, father."

"Yes, there's this one by her first husband. I don't know his name; he lives a long way off in South America—the Brazils, I think they call it."

"That is a beautiful place, father," Miriam spoke thoughtfully. "Miss Denton read us the other day how the people get ever so rich in Brazil; the corn and the trees grow up without planting; and the forests are full of parrots and beautiful flowers. Shouldn't you like to go there, father, and us to get ever so rich?"

Miriam's eyes sparkled and grew large, and her cheeks flushed.

"Rich! what can a little maid like you want to be rich for?"

"Don't *you* want to, father?" Miriam's eyes opened still wider. "Why, it's better to be rich than poor; we'd have a cow, and I don't know what, if we was rich; and we'd keep maids like Mrs. Purton do, and Nancy and me'd always have silk frocks to go to church in!"

Matthew smiled a quiet, pleasant smile.

"Mrs. Purton's a rich tradesman's wife. Her husband's got a fine, thriving business; and such things come to her by right; but it isn't keeping maids and wearing silk gowns as makes folk happy, Miriam. There's poor, young, Mrs. Llewellyn has gowns and maids to spare, and she looks sad enough."

"Poor lady!" said Miriam. "But I should like to go to Brazil;" she only murmured this while she fondled her father's

lean large-veined hand between her soft, dimpled palms.

Matthew Blane went on smoking. His thoughts were in the large house a mile or so on the way to Dinton. He pondered far more than he spoke. His child's words might have given him food for anxious thought; but then he never could have dreamed of anxiety in regard to Miriam. She was as surely the pet spotless lamb as Nancy was like to prove the black sheep of the family. Simple as he was, Matthew was not free from the human tendency to trouble himself about his neighbours, and he wondered why a young, bright creature like Mrs. Hugh Llewellyn should have been chosen out for bereavement.

It may be that, in her first agony of sorrow, the young widow wondered too;

but some weeks have passed since the parting came, and Norah Llewellyn has regained outward composure. Look at her while she says good-by to her brother, and see how lovely she is still, spite of her pale sadness! Most of her dark hair is hidden by her cap, and yet the beauty of her face is scarcely dimmed by its absence. It is difficult to say what makes Norah so specially lovely. A pair of large dark imploring eyes and a small delicate mouth remain in your memory; but that is all you could find to detail now that colour has left the fair skin. Yet even Mr. Spenser Montgomery, as he shakes his sister's hand as he goes away, is impressed with Norah's grace and beauty.

"Such a pity—such a great mistake that marriage!" says Mr. Montgomery to himself, as he takes his way back to London. "Norah is just the woman to make a really good

match if she maintains her position, and now she'll lose caste altogether—that is the worst of marrying a parson. When he dies a woman loses house and society and position—all that is worth living for."

He shrugged his shoulders and wrapped his railway-rug more closely round him, and then opened his *Times*, so as completely to shut off his fellow-passengers.

Our business is with Norah, so we must go back at once to the house on Dinton Moor.

Norah turns into the dining-room, after saying good-by to her brother; her long black dress sweeps round her, and adds dignity to her graceful movements; she is about middle height, and yet she looks small beside her mother-in-law. Mrs. Llewellyn may have been handsome once, but her features must always have been too large for prettiness; there is power and strength in her face, in her

square chin, and the straight bands of iron-grey hair that mark off her forehead in such a hard line; power, too, in the hand that rests on the red marble mantel-shelf.

"My dear," she says—there is a tenderness in her voice you hardly expected, and you can hear that she is trying to keep it steady—"are you sure you are right in deciding now. Why not take time—time may change your opinion altogether."

Norah goes up to her and lays her small white hand on Mrs. Llewellyn's large knuckles.

"Do you want to get rid of me, mother?" there is a smile on her lips, but they quiver too much to keep it there; "if not, till you tire of Hugh and me, we are going to stay with you."

Mrs. Llewellyn waits before she answers.

"Still, my child, do not decide hastily. If you stay with me you know how much you sacrifice: you give up what is called society. I can't live in London, Norah, even if I were rich enough: I always fall ill when I get there. I don't want to lose you. God knows I don't," she broke off impetuously from the calm voice in which she had spoken; "but I want you to see clearly what you are doing. If you refuse to go and live with your brother now, you may find it difficult to renew your relations with him afterwards."

"I shall never wish to live with Spenser. I can't imagine why you should think I am likely to change," says Norah, sorrowfully.

Mrs. Llewellyn looks at her, and her harsh features soften as if she longed to take the sweet stricken girl to her heart and comfort her; but she does not seem satisfied.

"What I really mean, Norah, is, that Mr. Montgomery is your own brother, and you have only known me these last two years, since I came to live with you. How do you know you mayn't tire of me, my dear? I'm no angel; at times I'm very out-spoken, and I daresay as tiresome as other people are when they are cross and growing old. Till now you have loved me as Hugh's mother; it is all so changed, my poor dear child."

Norah covers her face with her hands, but she is not crying when she draws them away again.

"You are generally right, mother," she speaks, firmly, "but you are wrong now. I don't want to blame my brother. I was vain and silly enough when I married, but I never agreed with his notions, he is so worldly. You have taught me nothing but good; you have always loved me—and,

mother, how can you say the tie is broken; is our darling gone from us really, and have we not the boy?"

And then Norah holds up her mouth to be kissed, as if to say the matter is ended.

Her mother-in-law kisses her heartily, but she says nothing. No one would guess from her outward manner what a mighty load has been taken from the mind of the elder Mrs. Llewellyn.

Little Hugh is her only grandchild, and she is as complete a slave to the young tyrant as most strong-minded women become under the same relationship.

It would have been a sore trial to lose him.

Mrs. Llewellyn walks to the window and knocks at it. A little fellow playing on the gravel just below the window runs off to the hall-door at the summons, and comes rushing into the room, his fair hair

flying, his eyes and cheeks glowing from the frosty air outside. He brings light and life and joy to the mourners.

Without deigning one look towards his grandmother he runs up to Norah and hugs her black skirts in his strong young clasp.

"Come out and play, mummy, do come; nurse is such a stupid old horse she can't canter, she only runs; she says there's no difference, and she cries like a baby when I lash out with my whip."

"Oh you mustn't lash poor nurse, darling;" Norah kneels down and puts herself on a level with her boy and kisses him with long yearning kisses.

"Mummy"—Hugh nestles his fair head into his mother's shoulder—"why do you wear a cap?" he whispers. "I don't like you in a cap—only old women and maids wear caps—please don't wear it, darling little mum."

But Mrs. Llewellyn has heard.

"Run out again, my boy," she says. "I'll come and be your horse—mamma's tired, Hugh."

Hugh gives a wistful look up in his young mother's face, but she does not offer to play at horses. He goes slowly out again.

"I say, grannie, make haste about it," he calls from the bottom of the steps.

Norah sits down and covers up her face, and Mrs. Llewellyn sees tears streaming through her fingers.

"Hugh reminds me strangely of Godfrey, my dear. I am sure Godfrey will take a fancy to Hugh."

"Ah yes,—perhaps," says Norah.

The grandmother goes to get her bonnet and cloak, and the young widow finds herself almost for the first time battling with strong contradiction against Mrs. Llewellyn's words.

"Hugh never really loved his half-brother. I am sure he would not like me to trust our child to Godfrey Brendon."

And then Norah looks across the long formal red-curtained room with aching weariness. How can she drag through the long life that seems to stretch before her, all alone?

"And yet my mother has gone through this anguish twice, and she seems happy—ah but——"

Norah is too loving to let the thought grow unchecked; but in that moment it seems to her that, if Mrs. Llewellyn had loved her first husband as she herself loved Hugh, she would not have married again.

Norah's thoughts go back to her boy.

"If Godfrey Brendon offers to adopt him I shall refuse; and I am afraid he will offer, he seems to have been very fond of my darling husband, but I know

Hugh never returned his affection, so there must be something wrong about him. But why do I anticipate evil."

And then Norah almost smiled at her own fear.

When her husband Hugh Llewellyn went to Oxford, his half-brother Godfrey Brendon set forth to seek his fortune in South America. At first there had been a frequent interchange of letters, but during the last few years these had grown rare, for some months past his mother even had heard no tidings of Mr. Brendon.

"He has forgotten all about us; so much the better,"—Norah checked herself. "I quite forget poor mamma's feelings. Godfrey has always been her favourite, and she must want him sorely now that she is alone." She stopped, and the tears came rushing to her eyes again. "I can't help it, I know it is selfishness, but I don't

want Godfrey Brendon to come to England while my boy is so young."

Meanwhile Mrs. Llewellyn goes into the garden, a willing victim to the young tyrant, whip in hand, willing determinately that which she wishes to happen.

"Godfrey must come to England and be a father to the boy; he is unmarried, and Hugh will have his money; the child is far more like him in disposition than he is like poor gentle Hugh."

CHAPTER I.

MIRIAM'S LETTER.

It is a very hot July afternoon. The wheelwright's cottage looks much as it looked seven years and a half ago, with its porch in the centre, and a window on each side; the roof is more moss-grown, the projecting eaves are a trifle more ragged and hang more closely over the three upper windows, and a honeysuckle has grown up into such clustering luxuriance over the porch that it is the resort of all the bees of the neighbourhood.

This afternoon the bees straggle by twos and threes in at the open door under the porch; there is a heavier fragrance

there than honeysuckle blossom. The porch opens into a broad, low entrance-passage floored with lime-ash, with the kitchen on the left and the parlour on the right. Rizpah Blane is busy over the clear red kitchen fire in turning black currants into jam—so busy that her active tongue is silent; the fire is made of logs on a large open hearth, and the preserving-pan hangs by a hook from the chimney. The heat grows fiercer, the seething purple mess bubbles with hissing pink froth, Rizpah trembles for her jam and raises the pan an inch or so from the red glow. She lets it down again, draws her lilac cotton gown with one hand to a safe distance from the logs, and stirs the fruit round and round with a spoon.

"Nancy!—drat the girl, her's asleep I'll lay;" but she dares not look off the hissing pan.

Nancy is awake, though she has been dreaming. Dreaming over her sewing, as she sits in the porch among the bees. She pockets a letter that lies in her lap, then she rises and looks in at the door. Nancy has grown into a tall, very shapely young woman, her eyes have darkened, and their expression is sweet, and her nose has a more decided form, still she is not much changed. Nancy Blane has an intelligent, candid, very pleasant face, but she is not handsome.

There is one striking change in her appearance; her dress, a blue and white striped print, is very neat and orderly, and her shining abundant dark hair is gathered smoothly into a knot of plaits behind.

"Reach me the jars a little closer, will ye?" Rizpah spoke irritably; there is something irritating about the making of jam, specially irritating when you are short and fat, and near-sighted besides, and it may

be that Rizpah's impatience was enhanced by the contrast Nancy's cool, undisturbed appearance afforded.

"Shall I help fill the jars, aunt?"

It would have been much pleasanter to contradict, but at that moment Rizpah's blood seemed on fire. She was glad of help, and it was some alleviation to her suffering to give Nancy the chance of scalding her fingers.

"I thought you wanted to watch and see how 'twas done, and there you've been droning away with they bees all the afternoon."

Nancy blushed.

"Time enough for me to learn jam-making," she said, laughing, "and you're not going to run away, aunt; you'll always show me, I know, when I want to learn."

"Oh, that's it, is it? I'spose you think that that time's not coming. My sakes!

the world is a-going round to a fine tune now-a-days. I 'spose, now, you expect to begin with as many maids as there was in Snow Street in Mrs. Purton's time."

Nancy's cheeks grew flaming red. She went on filling the jam-pots in silence.

"Oh it's all very well to take it like that," Rizpah grumbled on in an aggrieved voice. "I'm blind, of course I am, and old and stoopid, and all the rest of it. Bless yer heart, child, do you suppose as nobody never comed a courtin' of I when I were a young girl? there's no use in secret ways, Nancy." She shook her head. "Robert Purton don't come here of a evenin' to see I, no, nor your father neither, nor yet the cat, and it 'ud be honester and more to the puppose if you spoke up, and owned to he as a sweetheart—that it would, Nancy."

Nancy had gone on filling the jam-pots, and by this time the pan was empty.

Rizpah's harangue had cooled her wrath, and she wiped her face diligently with her apron.

When her aunt looked up Nancy had taken refuge in the porch again and was reading the letter she had put in her pocket a while ago.

It was from her sister Miriam, a long, crossed letter from Buenos Ayres. Three years ago Miriam Blane had nearly broken her father's heart by answering the advertisement of a lady about to start for Brazil, and in want of a nursery governess. Miriam was as sweet and as lovely as ever, and she had won the hearts of her employers; her home letters told how they had given her teachers and introduced her into society, and how much she was admired and sought after. Then she wrote that she had left these old friends, and was living with one of the most esteemed

families in Buenos Ayres as friend and companion of the mistress of it. This letter had come a month ago, and Nancy hungered for another. Miriam hinted that she was on the eve of marriage, but she did not speak of her intended husband. She spoke of the position she would be called on to fill, but she also said enough to show that she loved dearly, and Nancy's own heart was so full of the happiness of a near-approaching joy that she seemed able to picture far more than the letter told her.

"Darling Miriam," she kissed the letter, "and she must have grown such a beauty. She's a lady, too, now; ah! she always was so different to the rest of us; but still I don't believe she's forgotten us spite of what Rizpah says."

For though Rizpah and her niece agreed much better than they had done in Nancy's

childish days, still the loving sister grew hot at times in Miriam's defence.

"Don't talk to I," Rizpah had a way of saying, when one of Miriam's letters full of herself and her bright new life had been read aloud in family conclave; "bless your heart, Nancy, I knows as well as if I was inside of she—not that there'd be much room, it's filled up with self—but you'll see no more of Miriam; her's like a kite as has broke its string, maybe her'll come down torn to pieces one day, but her'll never come back to this place no more; don't you look for that, Nancy."

Rizpah began to growl again when she saw what Nancy was doing in the porch.

"Like all gals," she said, "full o' thought for young folk like theyselves — not a mossel to spare for us old'ns." She carried the huge brass pan into the wash-house behind the kitchen, and fell to

cleaning it, grumbling on in low monotone, something like a discontented baby put to sleep against its will—grumbling at Nancy the while, although she knew well enough that if her niece had offered help it would have been scornfully rejected.

Matthew Blane liked to see his girls useful, but there had always been a servant kept for the rougher drudgery of the house. At the time of his great sorrow for the loss of his lovely, petted child—a sorrow which poor Nancy had felt powerless to soothe—Rizpah Blane presented herself again at the cottage. She had been living in London as housekeeper to a single gentleman since she left Matthew; her master had died without making what she considered an adequate return for her services. "Why shouldn't Matthew take her in? She didn't want a maid under her —not she—she'd fifty times rather be alone

than have to clear after a dirty gal as couldn't in reason be expected to know what work was. She should be company for Nance, who must be lonesome without her sister; and young, too, she was to have to guide herself, with no one to look after her." For Rizpah had a poor opinion of her brother's powers except in regard to his workshop.

Nancy was, indeed, very lonely and miserable. She felt compassionate to the poor woman, suddenly deprived of a comfortable home, and when Matthew looked doubtingly from his sister to his daughter, wholly unable in his unhinged, sorrow-struck state to decide for himself, Nancy pleaded for Rizpah and gave a cheerful consent to take her in.

Considering all things, it was unreasonable that Rizpah should grumble as constantly as she did over the lot she had not

only chosen but striven for. But grumbling is as necessary to some of us as the air we breathe: there are in abundance people who, like the frogs in a marsh, keep up the same perpetual croaking "chorus," as though to remind one of their existence. Rizpah had a special talent for the brightening of brass and copper; perhaps her incessant grumble was as necessary to its perfection as the perpetual "hiss—hiss," so apparently inseparable from the proper grooming of horses.

Rizpah had not nearly finished cleaning her pan when a step coming along the road startled Nancy. She sat still after the first involuntary movement, and kept her eyes fixed on Miriam's letter; but the neat monotonous lines of writing seemed to converge here and there as the iron rails do at a railway junction, and then to divide again, suddenly spreading into fans

that danced off the page; and in time to this dance Nancy's heart beat, and the rebellious blood sprang to her cheeks and forehead and throat in such a wild, resistless rush that, for an instant, she felt as if she must run upstairs, or hide anywhere out of Robert Purton's sight.

Nancy had no need to look up for information as to those approaching footsteps. Every tread coming so firmly down the slope from Shallerton seemed to be pressing on her heart. The feeling was so strange, and yet so unutterably delightful. She and Miriam had always snubbed Robert Purton in younger days as a tall, shy boy, who hadn't a word to say for himself. Then Robert went away to a school at some distance, and soon Nancy began to think boys' schools must be wonderful places to work such a change. She had heard it said that Mr. Purton was making a "soft" of

his tall, good-looking lad by keeping him at learning so long; but Mr. Purton had justified himself in the opinion of Shallerton folk when Robert, at eighteen, got an appointment, with a liberal salary, as bailiff to a nobleman.

Success has such an irresistible way of reconciling people to anything. When a man falls, or, at any rate, keeps on one level without rising, it is so easy to see every blemish about him; but let him once get above our level, even, it may be, but by the help of a stray wind, which has lifted him without any effort of his own to the point he has often so manfully struggled in vain to reach,—and spots and specks are undiscernible as we gaze up after him; the sunshine of his prosperity dazzles our eyes, and we proceed at once to glorify him and his doings.

Railing at the weaknesses of human

nature—in itself a weakness—has kept Robert Purton over long making foosteps along the Shallerton road — not longer than it seemed to the young man himself. He would like to have cleared Matthew's garden palings at a bound, and then the little gravelled path at another; but he was not quite sure of his reception, and dreaded giving the least cause of offence to Matthew Blane.

CHAPTER II.

NEWS FROM ABROAD.

MATTHEW BLANE was at that moment seated in Mr. Purton's dining-room in Snow Street, Shallerton, a large, comfortable-looking room, with the low ceiling crossed by heavy beams, that involuntarily contrast the notions of our fathers respecting strength and reality, with the showy falsehoods we call dwelling-houses now-a-days. There were crimson-curtained windows, with deep-cushioned seats in them; long low walls of panelled oak; a huge sideboard at one end, with a great silver tray in the middle; and above it and on one side of the room were gloomy oil-

pictures, of unknown but classical subjects, in which olive-green trees and slatey clouds, shaped like undulating sausages on a dark ground, were the chief characteristics. Here and there a streak of yellow across the olive denoted a riven tree, and an occasional flutter of red, blue, and white in the foreground hinted at figures fleeing from the lightning contained in the sausage overhead. Mr. Purton was known to be wealthy, and it is a decided sign of wealth and also of dignity to have oil-pictures on your walls, even if their surface be as cracked as the enamel on an ancient teacup, and their foliage the tint of the tea-grounds once therein contained. There were some portraits interspersed, one a likeness of the late Mrs. Purton, a meagre-faced woman, with colourless eyes and pale eyelashes.

But Matthew Blane's face is a much

more absorbing object than any portrait could be. He is sitting bolt upright, a strange attitude for his usual stooping figure; one hand grasps his grey chin, and the other, firmly clenched, presses on the table. The man's whole strength is concentrated on self-restraint. Opposite him are seated a dull-eyed, weary man in the dress of a common soldier, and Mr. Purton, the rich timber-merchant of Shallerton. Mr. Purton is a middle-sized, well-made man, with firm, narrow lips, straight, black eyebrows, and much breadth of forehead; but his black eyes are too keen and hard in expression, as if they were kept so sharp for constant use that no stray tear had a chance of finding its way into them.

"Say that again," said Matthew, abruptly.

The soldier looked up at his altered voice.

"Well, master, I don't say it willin', God knows! and I hadn't thought to ha' said it out to you at all, but for Mr. Purton here."

"Say it again, man, and make short work of it!"

Mr. Purton's straight eyebrows moved with uneasiness. It was unnatural to hear quiet Matthew Blane speaking so harshly; but he nodded to the soldier to obey.

"Well, master, as I said the day I reached Buenos Ayres, there was a gay wedding, and I stood to see the bride and bridegroom come out o' the Consel's house; and, as I said just now, I heard their names was Godfrey Brendon and Miriam Blane; and an Englishwoman in the crowd says, 'I can remember the bride when her wasn't such a grand lady as her is now.' Somehow the name struck I,

for I used oft to see your two pretty lasses, Master Blane, when I was a lad here at home; and I asked the woman did her know as the bride came fro' Shallerton, and her says, 'yes, surely;' then says I, 'I'm a-goin' home on sick leave, and I'll tell Mr. Blane I see his daughter, Mrs. Brendon.' I sailed a week after, and it was aboard ship I learned the news I told you just agone. One of the sailors as I were a tellin' about the grand marriage as I'd seen, for there was a deal of fuss made of it, him says as it warn't no marriage at all; fust him wouldn't say why, and then him laughed; and him says, 'There be another Mrs. Brendon.' I arst he what him means, and then him says, 'Her is to be found if she's husband claims she, which I don't think him will, for the reason that them agree best apart.' I arst he were him sure o' this, and did Mr. Brendon

know his wife were living. Him says him couldn't help being sure, as him been servant to Mr. Brendon when his wife and he parted. Mr. Brendon might know her were living, or him might not, but hisself never heard of she's death. I said her might be dead; it warn't likely as him going back'ard and for'ards in the vessel, could hear all what happened in shore; and then him said, 'him didn't believe, as many besides hisself knew about the other Mrs. Brendon; her and she's husband had both kep the affair dark; but his own sister was still with Mrs. Brendon as she's maid; and him got a letter from this sister every now and again. If the mistress had died it must ha' been within a fortnight or so of the marriage.' An' that's jist as I heard it."

Matthew sat pale and silent, his hand still pressed heavily on the table.

Mr. Purton spoke eagerly. "But don't you think, Daniel, if the first wife had been alive she would have interfered to prevent such a scandal?"

"Well, sir, I thought as much; but my sailor whistled when I said it, says he, 'Not her, bless your heart; her's a Brazilian, and an out-an-out devil of a temper; her'd only be too glad; it 'ud be a sign to she that Mr. Brendon never meant to trouble his head about she and she's doings; besides, her lives up at Bahia; her's plenty of money of she's own, and lives away like anything, as most on 'em does out here what has the means so to do. So, sir, I'm afeared it's true.'"

Matthew Blane had risen and was moving towards the door.

"Oh stay a moment, Blane, sit down again, please," said Mr. Purton, in his bustling way. "I say, Daniel, just step

downstairs and get a glass of beer, and keep your mouth shut, d'ye hear, *my friend*," a pompous emphasis on the words; "don't wish his misfortune made gossip all over Shallerton."

A sudden writhing pain showed in Matthew's pale face—of a grey paleness now. He stood grasping his stick, impatient to get away, while Mr. Purton closed the door on the soldier.

Mr. Purton came back to the table, rubbing his hands. He did not mean this as a sign of cheerfulness; he was nervous at that moment—a rare sensation for him—and yet he could not repress a certain amount of self-gratulation.

"This is very sad. Pray sit down, Blane," he said, and the soothing tone brought a flush across Matthew's pale face.

"No, Mr. Purton, I'm best at home just now."

Mr. Purton seated himself. "My good friend, you mustn't take it so much to heart; it don't appear to me that your daughter" — Matthew turned his head away—"has been to blame in this matter; you may depend as soon as she finds out she's been wronged she'll come home to you again. I'm very sorry, you don't doubt that, I'm sure, and I'm sure you'll think I acted rightly in letting you see Daniel. Very odd, wasn't it—my happening to see you passing so soon after Daniel had told his news? uncommon odd it seems to me. He's been a wild young fellow has Daniel; he was brought up in my own yard, and then he went to the bad and enlisted; but, with all his faults, he always spoke the truth, and I'm sure you may credit what he says."

"I don't doubt it," came in low tones from Matthew Blane's pale lips.

"Yes, but you still have a kind of resentment towards me for letting you see him; oh yes you have, my dear friend; but you see, Blane, I was awkwardly placed; my son told me this very morning that he had got some notion of an attachment to your youngest daughter."

Matthew turned round and fixed his eyes sternly on Purton; the timber-merchant paused, with his mouth open.

"He told you that, did he? 'twould ha' been more to the purpose to tell *me* so, I'm thinkin'."

"I've no doubt he intends it, my good friend: Robert is the very soul of honour; yes, really, no one more so," and Mr. Purton put his thumbs in his waistcoat-pockets as he expanded in the consideration of his son's good qualities; "but you just see my difficulty. Nancy is a very good girl, very, and I suppose one can't

control these things;" there was a sudden lighting up in Matthew's eyes, and Mr. Purton went on quickly: "well, we'll not discuss that now, it's over and done with. All I wish to point out, my good friend, is, that, after what we've just heard, it won't do to encourage it; in fact, I shouldn't like the thing to go on now; couldn't have it, in fact; disgrace is bad enough when it's sent direct, but it never has touched the name of Purton yet, and I don't see why it should."

"Mr. Purton"—Matthew stood at his full height and looked down at the well-dressed, dark-eyed tradesman—"don't you fear me or my daughter'll trouble you. You mean well, I don't doubt, but you see real trouble's not come nigh your hearth-stone, and you don't know what 'tis. Good day."

And then Matthew went out at the door,

unmindful of Mr. Purton's outstretched hand, and his freshly-assumed look of concern.

"Dear me," said the timber-merchant, "I'm quite sorry for Blane—I really am—but it was necessary to put the thing in its right light at once. Robert may do so much better, so very much better; and these early marriages are so fearfully ill-judged, and then this dreadful business."

Mr. Purton blew his nose and really looked sorry.

His father and Matthew Blane's father had been partners in early life (wheelwrights), but the one had married for love, the other for money; the rich wife of the elder Purton had been ambitious, and the partnership between the wheelwrights was soon severed. Mrs. Purton never rested till she saw her husband foreman of the very timber-yard her son now owned. By

this time John Purton was nineteen. His father died; the employer was a widower, with an only daughter; and before Mrs. Purton died she saw her son the husband of this daughter, with every prospect that the business itself must fall to him. Yes, John Purton had done much better than Matthew Blane. His father had always insisted that the old friendship should be kept up between the families; and since Mrs. Matthew Blane's death this had been renewed, but there had always been an amount of patronage in the manner of John Purton and his lady wife which had prevented real intimacy. Matthew had had blessings quite unknown to John Purton, and yet not unenvied by him. Matthew had married the love of his youth in the pride of her beauty, and her loveliness had been perpetuated in one at least of her daughters. John had married

to please his mother, a silly, cold-hearted, worldly woman, much older than himself, and ugly. He had a son certainly a father might well be proud of as regarded looks, but Robert had not inherited his father's peculiar talents—talents which had doubled the value of John Purton's business, and placed it on a far higher scale than his father-in-law's ambition had aimed at.

"Robert," his father said to himself, "is a good-looking, honest, plodding fellow, and that is all. As awkward as a great cart-horse, and as slow."

Robert had insisted on being a farmer, and his father's only consolation lay in the fact that he was fit for nothing else. Mr. Purton considered that the agricultural mind was usually limited to its special resources, and, therefore, when he had laid by a few more thousands, he meant to sell the timber-yard at a high price and live

in dignified retirement. Lately, however, Robert had inflicted a bitterer mortification on his father than even his choice of a state of life, and this was the confession of his attachment to Nancy Blane.

CHAPTER III.

A CONFESSION.

"MAY I come in?"

Nancy was obliged to rise and go forward to meet Robert Purton.

They were both so shy that a bystander would have said they met unwillingly.

Nancy could not hold her head erect. She feared her secret was written on her face; and Robert's love had so quickened into sudden passion at the sight of her that he trembled lest it should find no response. His love made him feel so unworthy, and he stood tongue-tied—sheepish. His eyes were fixed on Nancy's face; in her varying complexion and down-

cast eyes he saw only unwillingness to listen to his suit.

Nancy took refuge in speech; she felt Robert's gaze on her burning face—she longed to shade it with her hand, but her arms were nerveless.

"Did you meet father?" She twisted the letter she held between her fingers.

"No." Robert spied the letter, and the kind of wild-beast sensation which the hint of a rival causes brought back his courage.

"Nancy"—he came a step nearer, but he spoke as if he were angry—"I have been trying to see you alone this long time, and now I don't know whether I've been wise in getting this chance."

Nancy looks up; her great grey eyes are very dark as the pupils dilate in full surprise.

"Why not wise?" she says simply; and

then she remembers that Robert is still standing in the porch. "Won't you come in and sit down?" She says this more collectedly and goes on into the cottage and sits down herself.

But her composed manner torments him, and his eyes are still on the letter in her hand.

He sits down and puts his hat on a chair beside him, but he cannot speak; simply because he dares not ask the question that hangs on his lips. He cannot speak of anything more trivial.

It seems too to Nancy that she cannot find anything to say. She struggles for a subject.

"I am so wanting to hear from Brazil again," she says presently, with a glance at the letter.

"Is that letter, then, from your sister Miriam?"

Nancy starts at the eager way in which Robert puts his question. She looks at her lover with a sweet bright smile.

"To be sure;" to herself she adds, "What ails Robert, I never saw him like this?"

"Nancy," says the young man softly, "I beg your pardon; I've been a fool. Nancy, darling, how can I ever make you know how much I love you."

He has risen up and goes close to Nancy, and he bends down over her as if he expects her answer to be a whisper.

But no answer comes; instead there is a great silence. His own words have been spoken almost without his will, and Nancy sits still, hushed by a sudden joy which seems too great to be real. She listens for those dear words again, she cannot believe that it is true that Robert loves her.

"Nancy, darling, are you angry? let me

see your face;" the words come stealing into her mouth—he bends so closely over her—"Tell me you are not angry. Give me a little hope, won't you?"

Even if she had not loved him she must have turned at this, there was such a pathetic appeal in his voice. She turned her blushing face ever so little, and raised the shy drooping eyelids, and then she felt frightened and happy all at once, for Robert's arm was round her, and he was holding her close to his heart. Nancy had looked a tall, well-grown girl a while ago, but now she looked almost fragile clasped in Robert's strong arms, her face hidden on his shoulder.

I do not think lovers talk at such a moment; it is such a strange mingling of delirious happiness and intense rest that they are simply over-done with emotion; besides, there is no need of words.

Time went by unheeded till the sound of Rizpah's footsteps overhead recalled Nancy to the probability of interruption.

"You will not make me wait long, Nancy, darling, you will be my wife soon?"

Robert kept her hand in his as he looked with delight in the timid blushing face.

"But are you sure about your father?" she said shyly.

"Quite sure, darling; he and I had a long talk this morning. Ah, Nancy, if you were like most girls you'd frown at me for planning before I'd got your consent; but you're so good, so different;" his arm stole round her again. "I wanted to be ready with an answer to your father, darling; as it is, he'll not think me deserving of you, I know that; and no more I am; Nancy, my darling, my darling, say again that you love me or I shall not believe it."

Nancy looked up with sweet wonder in her eyes. Love had changed these two; it had made the lively girl silent, and the quiet, self-contained man full of talk—a kind of prose hymn of joy and thankfulness, which was to Nancy the most exquisite language she had ever heard, and yet which to a third person would have been a monotonous repetition of fervently spoken words.

"And you do believe how much I love you, Nancy?—you don't mind me saying it so often?"

"I could listen all day," she whispered. She forgot all about Rizpah's heavy footsteps overhead, all about her father's possible return. Robert's arm was still round her, and her head nestled shyly on his shoulder, while she smiled and blushed at his love.

Matthew Blane opened the garden gate,

and trod slowly and heavily along the foot-path to the cottage, but the lovers were deaf to his approach. They did not notice him till he stood in the passage looking into the room. Nancy drew herself away from her lover, but Robert went forward, held out his hand, and looked Matthew frankly in the face.

"Robert Purton, what are you doing here?" Matthew Blane spoke angrily, a rare tone for his voice. "You've no right to come underhand into my house seeking my girl's love. I gave you no leave, nor do I give it now. I tell you once for all"—his voice rose and trembled with its anger—"not to come here again."

"But, Mr. Blane, don't be angry. I don't want to be underhand." Robert tried to take Matthew's hand, but he found this impossible. "I've done nothing underhand. I was only waiting the chance

of speaking to you. I never said a word about love till to-day, and I should have waited to ask you for Nancy if you hadn't come now."

Robert's face flushed; he felt his honesty was doubted, and he was angry with Nancy's father; but Nancy heard something new and strange in her father's voice. She put aside her confusion and the overmastering power of her newly-freed love, and went up to Matthew Blane.

"Father"—she put her hand gently on his shoulder—"what is it ails you; don't be vexed with us, dear, you know we wouldn't act undutiful towards you for the world, would we, Robert?"

But Robert only heard querulous anger in Matthew's voice; his spirit rose against this injustice, and now it seemed to him that Nancy was weak.

"Nancy, I can't let you off your pro-

mise," he said, "and you can't have changed your mind all in a moment."

Robert was exasperated, like a dog robbed of a bone. But Matthew, in his over-wrought anguish, heard only the superior tone of the elder Purton repeated in the son; it was too much to bear in his own house.

"Young man," he said, harshly, "I spoke plain enough just now. I mean no offence to you or yours. I won't have you here with Nancy. I don't doubt your good intentions; but you don't mate with a child of mine with any consent of mine. I can't speak plainer, can I, Robert Purton?"

Matthew looked strangely angry, and anger in a meek face is terrible; but, when he saw the deep pain in Robert's eyes, Matthew's mouth drooped and his frown softened; he could not soften in words;

he wanted to be rid of this intruder at any cost; he wanted to be alone with Nancy, to vent some of the pent-up passion of shame and anguish that had been choking him as he came down Shallerton road.

He had not long to wait.

Robert slowly took his hat from the chair and stood ready to depart.

"Well, Mr. Blane, I don't understand your anger. I can't think you know the sorrow you're causing. Nancy and I have not come to this all in a minute. I know well enough I'm not good enough for her: no one could be; but then, if she's willing to take me as I am, it seems desperate hard in you to cross us without a reason, and say we're not to get a word together. I can't give in to it," he said, doggedly; "so I tell it you out face to face; it's beyond bearing; it's flat tyranny, that's what it is, Mr. Blane."

In spite of her trouble Nancy looked up in admiring surprise; this newly-found eloquence in Robert roused her reverence. She had expected him to go away quietly, sulky, and angry doubtless, but too shy to say a word of remonstrance to her father.

But Matthew stood silent still, and looked towards the door.

Robert waited, but when no answer came but that outlook at the open door, which was too plain to be mistaken, the young man turned away angrily.

He went close up to Nancy, and took both her hands in his.

"Good-by, Nancy;" then he whispered, "God bless you, my own own darling, you'll be true to me, won't you, my precious girl?"

He pressed both her hands tightly in his, and went away without even a good-by to Matthew Blane.

Nancy stood with heaving bosom and dilated eyes; it seemed as if her heart went out after her lover. While Robert had frowned at her father, the contrast his youth and strength had made beside Matthew's pale, sorrow-struck appearance, had roused the girl's sympathy against him; but now that she looked into blankness where Robert had just this minute stood, and grasped all at once the belief that the blankness was her future life, for ever cut off from Robert, revulsion came, and with it something of indignation against the grey, exhausted man beside her.

Matthew sighed heavily, and then he sat down.

"Where's Rizpah?"

"Upstairs; do you want her?"

He shook his head. "Shut all the doors," he said, in a thick, gasping voice.

Nancy shut them; she felt full of fear

and doubt. She had never seen her father like this.

"What's the matter, father?"

Matthew's head had sunk on his breast, but he raised it, and looked at Nancy.

The candid clear eyes seemed more than he could bear: he covered his face with his hands.

"Oh my God, my God!" he cried, "it's too hard. Nancy," he went on, "it's very hard on you, but you'll bear it, I know you will, Nancy;—we must bear it. There's news, lass, news from Brazil!" His voice grew husky, and he moved his eyes unsteadily from her face; but Nancy did not heed; her soul was stirred by his words. "A villain out there, child, a black-hearted villain, has taken your sweet, innocent sister from her home and married her, when he wasn't free to do it." Matthew's voice grew quicker and louder,

and the veins on his temples stood out blue against the crimson flush that rose to his forehead. "My God! if I was only there, the villain, I'd kill him; I'll go there, lass—I'll go at once and save my darling from sin and disgrace; my darling, my darling!"—

His voice rose into a sharp, shrill cry, so unearthly a sound that Nancy fled to the stair-foot.

"Rizpah!" she called, "Rizpah, help, help!" before she knew that her father had fallen into the chair beside him.

A strange gurgling sound recalled her.

When Rizpah's heavy step at last reached the stair-foot she saw Matthew white, and, to all seeming, dead, and Nancy bent over him, trying to stanch the flow of blood streaming from his lips.

CHAPTER IV.

THE COTTAGE BY THE RIVER.

If you turn your back on the sea and follow the river Spar from its mouth, it leads towards the gorge which backs the little village of Sparmouth, a deep valley lying between high hills. On the left a hanging wood of ash and beech rises some two hundred feet, and on the right the bare ragged crags are still higher; not altogether bare, it seems as if nature had tried to clothe their ruggedness with scanty grass and tufts of gorse and heather, but the giant rock has been impatient of these attempts, and has forced its grey ribs everywhere through

the slender covering; half-way down its steep side the high-road winds along, bordered by a low stone wall, and from this the descent to the river below is a sheer precipice, except for masses of broken crag, which, stopping on their way, have covered themselves near the water's edge with overhanging brambles, hoary now with buds, and here and there bursting into exquisite white and pale lilac blossom.

Below, the river comes sparkling over its stony bed, springing from one grey rock to another, with an effort that showers a cascade of foam into the clear brown water; it is so clear that the pebbles shine up through it in a mosaic of scarlet, and purple, and white, and olive, and slate, and more colours than can here be set down.

Judging from the rate at which it runs

and the impetuosity of its course, the river's birth-place lies somewhere high up in the hills that close in the farther end of the valley, or rather seem to close it, for, following the footpath below the wood on the left, when the sharp bend is reached, you only find yourself in a valley similar to that you have been pursuing; like it and yet filled with unspeakable variety.

It is as much as the water can do here to find its way among the huge fragments of rock that choke its bed, grey, and green, and gold, when the sun shines on the rich-hued lichen that covers many of them. Sometimes the water forces a channel between two of these fragments, and then it rushes through in a sheet of silver foam, making the rock black by contrast; the rest of the stream, jealous of this free passage, takes flying leaps

on either side, and so comes down far below, having lost much in volume by the mist of dashing spray it sends overhead.

Instead of brambles, the rugged bank on the right is fringed with a belt of fir-trees, and through these the setting sun gleams on the great grey rocks in the river-bed, and makes yet more intense the green of lady-ferns nestling among them; here and there in a crevice of the masses of rock, an ash has taken root in the very centre of the river, and droops its graceful branches thirstily over the water.

Farther on the pathway grows steeper and the river narrows; ash-trees have rooted themselves below the rock, and some way up its rough side, and their branches mingling completely with those from the wood opposite, give the valley the aspect of a thickly-wooded glen; through this the river comes foaming and

struggling in still more impetuous leaps and cascades than even at the bend itself.

Hill rises against hill, each shouldering the other as they circle in the winding course of the stream, and form gorges which, in this mellow evening light, are full of exquisite purple shadow. Among the grey rocks runs a strata of crimson, and against this the tender ash-green doubles in beauty of tint.

On the woodside there are two path-ways, one beside the water, the other some way higher; a wild, wandering track, broken up by huge contorted tree-roots, or encroached on by the fringing ferns that hereabouts seem lords of the soil.

Just above the bend, about half-way between these paths, is a cottage white-washed and thatched; and, coming upon it suddenly, you might fancy yourself in Fairyland.

The cottage is only one-storied, with one dormer window rising out of the thatch: one side projects considerably towards the river, and ends in bow-windows, shaded by a verandah running all round the house. Up the verandah pillars, on its roof, and even to the thatch above, clusters a luxuriance of starry passion-flowers and gleaming fuchsias and fragrant clematis; and, more exquisite than all the rest, rich clusters of China roses, with blushing buds and gold-tasselled paler cups. The angle the projection makes is filled by a grass-plot, the beds cut in it blazing with scarlet and gold, and blue, tempered by a delicate white frostwork of leaves. There is another bow-window facing these flower-beds, and under this part of the verandah Norah and her mother-in-law sit at their needlework.

They are not much changed. Mrs. Llewellyn's hair has a broader streak of white across it; and Norah is handsomer than ever. She wears a lace-cap now, and it sets off her dark hair rarely, but her dress is black still. Her face is flushed, and she compresses her lips as she bends over her needlework. It may be that the fine stitching requires close attention, or one would be inclined to think sweet Norah was angry with her companion.

She put the work aside, and stepped out on to the grass-plot.

"Hughie is late to-day," she said, in excuse of her abrupt movement, and then she went and looked over the little criss-cross fence beyond the grass-plot.

Mrs. Llewellyn looked after her, and she smiled. Her strong fingers sent her needle deftly in and out, but her thoughts were busy and disturbed.

"Poor Norah, she is vexed, though she thinks I don't see it. *I* know." The emphasis on this pronoun perhaps indicated that her own temper had also been lately ruffled.

"And," the old lady went on, after she had threaded her needle, "I'm afraid Norah will have often to be vexed. She is almost an angel, but she has no worldly wisdom, none whatever." And Mrs. Llewellyn gave a superior smile.

"No, no, I am not going to see my darling Hugh's prospects ruined, just because his mother has taken up this unaccountable prejudice against Godfrey. After all, I am an old fool to trouble about it. When she comes to know him, Godfrey will win Norah, as he always did win everybody else."

And here Mrs. Llewellyn gave a deep sigh; for in the vivid retrospect of God-

frey's youth and early manhood which her words had summoned before her, this facility for winning affection on the part of her eldest son had been fruitful of sorrow rather than of satisfaction.

"Mother, mother," — Norah spoke quickly, — "tell me if this is Robert Purton. Ah, he is out of sight already on the other side of the river. He was there, but you are too late. I have not seen him since we left the Rectory, but I am sure it must be him. Did I not hear you say he had a farm somewhere hereabouts?"

Mrs. Llewellyn had by this time joined her at the fence. Norah's face had brightened with excitement.

"Yes, he has a farm, but I don't know where: ten miles off or so, I think. It was Mr. Purton, the father, who put it into my head to come here. You remember,

Norah, I told you so at the time. He got quite enthusiastic in describing the scenery. Was Robert Purton walking, my dear?"

"Yes, he was going along there," and she pointed to the uncertain broken track below the pine belt. "Dear me, I wish I could have made him see me, we should have heard some Shallerton news."

"And yet you have no friends left there," said her mother-in-law. "I don't suppose any of the Shallerton folk remember much about us—a two years' residence soon fades away from the minds of people who have been rooted in the same place for generations."

"Yes. Oh, here comes Hugh," and Norah was through the gate and halfway down the bank to the lower footpath before Hugh saw her, he was so intent on the capture of a butterfly hovering over the water.

He saw her at last, and gave up his chase. The blooming, fair-haired boy looked almost as tall as the graceful woman bending over him, while he hugged her, with small regard for the disarrangment thereby caused to her hair and her cap. Norah's face glowed with bright happiness as she came up the bank, her boy's arm circling her slender waist, but his first words brought back the cloud again.

"I say, mother darling, when's uncle Godfrey coming?"

Hugh nodded to his grandmother, but he had no elaborate tenderness for her. She was not fragile and lovely—she did not want cherishing and protecting as his darling, beautiful mother did, but he listened when she answered his question.

"Godfrey does not say when, Hugh, but I expect his next letter will tell me."

"Oh, I say, won't it be awfully jolly

when he comes?"—he flung his hat up and caught it—"and, grannie, he must buy the big house" — he pointed up the river. "Why, we might all go and live there together, mightn't we, mother?"

He spoke with breathless eagerness and then he gave his mother's waist a squeeze, as if his conscience reproached him for his words. There was an entreating look in Mrs. Llewellyn's eyes, but Norah felt hardened against them both; it seemed to her that she was wronged. Try as she would, she could not answer naturally.

"I don't like castle-building, Hugh, and, besides, I am very content with our own home."

"Hugh, my boy, I don't think Ben has fed your rabbits; hadn't you better go and see?" said his grandmother.

Hugh was off like an arrow, and then there was stiff, sore silence.

Norah quite understood Mrs. Llewellyn's diversion, and was wounded that his grandmother should interfere between Hugh and herself, and yet she knew that she had spoken irritably and unreasonably. After all, the boy had never known any uncle except Mr. Spencer Montgomery; if Mrs. Llewellyn's description was to be credited, Godfrey Brendon must be the sort of uncle Hugh would worship.

CHAPTER V.

NANCY BEGINS LIFE.

IT may be that, if we accept as direct messages sent to us all those strange unaccountable shrinkings and attractions which warn us from, or draw us to, persons and things, we shall become superstitious; and yet by yielding to their influence we escape very much of worry and the mental wear and tear consequent on that which is often a useless struggle against them—useless so far as issue is concerned, though the struggle may in some way have helped us. If Norah had known of the sorrow in the wheelwright's cottage on that glowing July evening she would not have

blamed herself so severely for her prejudices against Godfrey Brendon.

Rizpah Blane had a supreme contempt for doctors, and she managed to "bring Matthew round," as she called it, with only Nancy's help; "except for setting of limbs and such, and may be for infants, they ain't no more use," she said, "for curing, than constables is for catching thieves."

But when at last they had got the pale, exhausted man to bed, she called her niece outside the door, and stood on tip-toe to whisper as well as she could—for as her balance was defective, Rizpah resembled a stout pendulum in her oscillations from one foot to another,—

"Now, look you here, my gal, let's have it plain. Mat's not to be werritted about nothin', no matter what: he's been werritted into this, I'll lay. Doors may be

kep' shut, Nancy, but high words get thro' 'em; and Robert Purton didn't go off in the sulks, holding up his head like a drill-sergeant, for nothin'. I ain't askin' to know what's happen'd. There's things I'm not thought good enough to know about, and perhaps I ain't. My sakes! I don't set up for one of your clever ones, not I—they mostly ends by burning their own fingers at both ends, as you may say; but nussing comes to I as nat'ral as milk to cows; and I can't have no one meddlin' with Matthew; if you was to excise he or to set he off talking again I wouldn't answer but it might burst out all at once like the rose of the waterin' pot."

It was the first time Rizpah had asserted herself so openly, but she felt on vantage ground. She grumbled her life away from an unconscious though instinctive knowledge of her incapacity to act any of the

assertions of power which her words often suggested; but as a nurse she knew herself to have real skill, and she claimed her post with a decision and readiness which made Nancy, all untried in the work, glad to yield it to her.

Neither of them went to bed that night. Rizpah stayed with Matthew, and Nancy stole softly up and down to see if she could be of use, and to ask how her father was.

Rizpah sat at the foot of the old-fashioned four-post bed, her stout arms folded across her chest, and her head nodding drowsily; the rushlight stand at her feet, threw round spots of light on her face and dress, and likened her in the darkness to one of those painted horses which used to be the delight of juveniles.

"My sakes! I wish her'd go to bed," she ejaculated, when Nancy for the fourth time

had opened the door in a gentle, noiseless way, thereby nearly sending Rizpah into a fit; "don't her think nussin' unlively enough in itself without creakin' a door so as it make the very marrow of one's back grow blue with fright, but gals is always so! they hasn't a mossel o' thought for nobody except theyselves. I don't believe her have winked an eye this night."

Getting no answer but a shake of the spotted face, Nancy stole quietly down again to the room where she and Robert had been so happy in the afternoon.

"This very afternoon was it? it seems a weary while ago. I wonder why things are allowed to happen just to mock and tantalize, if they're not to be."

Nancy had been sitting with closed eyes in her father's high-backed chair. She started now at a slight cracking sound, and looked about her; the candle on the table

had grown heavy-headed for want of snuffing, and had wearily leaned its wick on one side; it was the sputtering that had roused her.

She got up and snuffed it, and so disturbed a white bull terrier lying fast asleep on the hearth-rug. He came quietly up to Nancy and licked her hands, and then rubbed himself against her.

"Poor Lil;"—she stooped and patted the dog—"I'm more selfish than you, you poor dog; you know there's something amiss or I wouldn't be here at this time of night, and so you neither play nor bark, and here am I sorrowing over myself when father may be——"

There came a lump in her throat, and she stopped.

When she sat down again she tried to think over her father's words.

Two things seemed plain—this blow had

caused his illness, and he was fully bent on going to find Miriam.

"But he cannot go, he cannot travel," said Nancy, "and if he could, the sight of her in his weak state, most like, would kill him; no, he must not be let go."

Again she sat thinking.

"I must go."

The words changed the whole current of her thoughts. She experienced the strange new sensation with which a strong nature, from circumstances, kept dormant or not called on to act, suddenly feels its own power rise, and like hitherto folded wings, bear it over what a while ago would have seemed impossibilities; a sensation which has nothing of unreality in it, and which seems at once to grow into purpose and definite action. She held her face tightly clasped between both hands; she did not move a hair's breadth; she wanted

to let the new-born flood of idea and purpose develop out of the powerful confusion in which they had thus suddenly generated.

Her first definite impulse was to fall on her knees and pray heartily for forgiveness.

She had arraigned God's justice, and in answer He had shown her a way of deliverance for her sister—a means of restoring peace to her father—and then, amid her penitence and her heartfelt thanksgiving, she mingled a prayer for help, for the sudden self-reliance that had sprung to life frightened her with its power.

She stayed long on her knees and she grew calmer as she went on thinking out what she must do.

She must seek Miriam; her father had not been explicit, but still Nancy had understood the truth. Miriam had in ignorance married some man who had a wife already.

"She will write and tell us of her happiness, poor darling, and I must go and take it all away; but it will be mercy to do it. How will she bear it? Miriam won't stay with a wicked man, I'm sure of that; she'll not love him when she knows——"

Quick as echo came the question—"If Robert were wicked should you leave off loving him?"

"Oh, it's awful hard to judge; I can't leave off loving Robert till my soul and my body are parted—nor then neither; surely I'll love him to all eternity."

The hot blood rushed blindingly to her eyes and forehead, it seemed to Nancy shameful to own her love so frankly, even alone in the darkness.

She sat pondering the ways and means of her journey. Matthew Blane's mother had inherited, late in life, a small property, and this had been carefully put by in the

Bank for Miriam and Nancy, to furnish wedding-clothes if they should marry. Miriam had spent some of her portion in her outfit when she went away. Nancy considered she should not be frustrating her grandmother's intentions if she drew out her own share to pay for this journey.

"Grandmother meant it to save father's pocket, and this is saving him."

The wick of the candle grew longer—longer still; the crickets chirped in the unearthly silence; at last the wick sank, gave one last shuddering glare, and then went out. Nancy took no heed, she sat there still in the darkness thinking—thinking of her father—planning out her journey, till a cold chill crept over her. Presently a grey glimmer began to steal into the room; slowly the darkness seemed to lift, or rather to vanish, before its advancing foe, and steadily the daybreak came on, finding

out its dark prey even in the very corners, and chasing it away.

Nancy opened the window carefully and looked out. The sky was a broad, dull bank of mystic purple, above which the tops of the pine-trees on the moor showed like phantoms; to the right a dull red carbuncle glowed through the purple, like subterranean fire, and further still a band of opaque green stretched into space. Gradually as the glowing carbuncle faded a golden line of light bordered the purple bank—a line which broadened quickly, growing more and more luminous; and while Nancy still stood gazing the sun rose and sate enthroned in glory on this golden bank, sending over all the sky above him a radiance and a glow.

The glow stole into Nancy's heart and cheered her.

"Why am I so cast down?" she said;

"why do I weary so to know how he takes the news? I shall never marry him. I could not take disgrace to him and his; but what then? I can always feel proud that I have had the true love of an honest man; that can't be taken from me, even if he's cast me off already; it's different with Miriam. How will she feel, poor darling, when she knows her husband is a villain, and what will she do?"

Nancy choked back the fear that rose.

"I couldn't go on living in sin myself," she said; "why should I doubt Miriam?"

She went into the washhouse and lit the fire, opened the windows, and swept up the floors, then she put the kettle on to boil and crept softly upstairs.

Rizpah met her at the stair-head.

"He's in a blessed sleep," she said, and the two women came down together.

Rizpah looked surprised to see all ready,

and then she took a sharp glance at Nancy.

The ruffled hair and heavy eyes told tales.

"My sakes! Nancy, child, you're not meanin' you've been up through this blessed night; you haven't winked an eye then, and what mortal good ha' you done, I'd like to know, unless it be wasting of candle-grease and frighting the crickets?"

"I couldn't have slept if I'd gone to bed," said Nancy, "I had so much to think about."

She looked very pale and weary. Rizpah was touched, and forbore to scold.

"Lass," she said, as she kissed her, "it would ease ye to speak out your trouble; it's choking of ye, that's what 'tis; won't Mat let Robert have ye?"

Nancy hesitated. The vague hope that Miriam's secret might be kept between

her father and herself had faded away with the night; the broad stream of sunshine, which was busy kissing every nook and corner of the room, as if in congratulation for its release from darkness, mocked anything like concealment. Nancy knew that her father had gone up town on the previous evening, and she shrank into herself, white even to her lips at the thought that Miriam was perhaps already publicly talked about in Shallerton.

"My sakes! lass, sit ye down." Rizpah was startled by her niece's death-like paleness. "What's ailin' ye?"—and then, indignant at her own question, she vented her wrath on Nancy. "Fine doin's, indeed, as if my hands arn't full and to spare, with Mat there, and you must go stayin' up in a hard chair, with a bed awaitin' for ye, tryin' to make yourself sick; there, I've no patience with such ways; folks has no

business to be thinkin' of theyselves; them should allus be full of thought for others."

The colour came rushing back to Nancy's face, and her eyes glistened; had she not spent much of her vigil in thoughts of herself and her love?

"I've had much, not about myself, to keep me waking, aunt. I don't see the use of keeping it from you; it isn't likely you'd speak of it again, but there's sore trouble come to us on account of Miriam."

Rizpah's small dark eyes grew round on the instant; the blue whites seemed to gain in size, and her grizzled chin trembled with curiosity. "There now, didn't I always know as her'd go wrong?" but this was a mental reflection: she stood with her arms akimbo, her mouth so wide open that her tongue was visible, quivering with its unspoken eagerness; she knew better

than to interrupt Nancy; experience had not been quite thrown away on Rizpah, so she only kept her eyes strainingly fixed on the earnest face above her.

Any one who had known Nancy as a child would have traced back the likeness, now that the wistful eyes looked through her tangled hair hanging once more in picturesque gipsy fashion about her face.

"This dreadful news is what struck father down, I fancy. Miriam, poor darling, has got married to some man who has a wife already, and that's why I was in no haste to get a doctor last night, when you said you could manage. Ill news travels fast enough without our helping it on. Poor dear, darling Miriam—she that was so modest and steady in all her ways."

"My sakes! it's just what I expected."

Nancy had put one hand over her eyes, and Rizpah was free from their influence.

"Don't tell I, Nancy; it ain't what a gal seems, but what her is; there's many a gal seems as harmless as they fat, quiet grubs, as lay under the fallen apple-tree, and, my sakes! if them didn't turn out huge monsters of flying beetles, with horns about as like the Evil One as could be; gals is just the same; no steady gal—any ways no gal as meaned to keep herself right —'ud ha' left she's home and she's father as Miriam did; and they quiet ones is allus the worst: they plagues o' worms as strips off the gooseberry-leaves, and rumpages about a bit, turns into harmless, foolish moths afterwards as you can squash with your little finger."

Nancy had grown redder and redder, and when Rizpah ended her anger flamed out.

"I wonder how you can speak so, aunt, when she is in such a sore strait, and none

of her doing. Oh, I wonder at you! Is it her fault because a villain has deceived her? and do you think Miriam will stay with him when she knows it?"

"How ye be put about, lass; and what for else can her do but stay with the man her's married with—there's no help for it: when a gal loses her good name, let the blame be whose t'will, her musn't quarrel with she's bread and butter, or her may chance go without."

"I'm going to her"—Nancy spoke with a determination that quelled her listener—"and I'm goin' to bring her back here, and see if we can't comfort her amongst us."

Rizpah's mouth fell open in sudden wonder. The idea of such a project robbed her of all words, till Nancy had gone to her father's room, and then she took up her apron and wiped her face with it.

"My word, and do Nancy think as a gal'll leave the man her's married for such a thing as that—bless she's heart, a marriage is a marriage out there, I'm thinkin', and, so long as first wives keeps quiet, for the matter o' that who's to say who's single, and who's not of most men? Bless Nancy, what the eye don't see the heart don't feel. Her far best leave Miriam quiet."

CHAPTER VI.

BUTTON COURT.

NORAH LLEWELLYN had not been mistaken. The man she saw from the other side of the rushing, foaming river was Robert Purton. He had chosen a roundabout way of going home instead of going cross country from the further end of Shallerton. He had been on his way to get the train at Dinton when he owned his love to Nancy; and even if this had not been so, he would have gone home to his farm instead of facing his father after the repulse from Matthew Blane.

Robert told Nancy that he had his father's sanction for his love to her, but he did not care to relate how hard a

battle he had had to fight before he gained it. He had gone so far as to tell his father he did not wish to be beholden to him one halfpenny. "Nancy is not a fine lady," he said, "and we can manage to shift somehow." And yet Robert Purton's heart was heavy while he said it. He had saved during his bailiffship, but he was young at farming; and though there might be enough to live on, it would take time to make a provision for his wife, and he had no right to take Nancy from her home, unless he could secure a comfortable and permanent one for her. Mr. Purton had yielded with much show of resistance, but still Robert had felt himself victorious.

"How could I face him now?" he said bitterly. He had left the train at Sparmouth and he had full six miles of road before him, but it was a relief; the outside of the coach would have been full of sociable

fellow-travellers; he was in no mood for talk, and, besides, the coach-road wound so in and out among the circling hills that he should hardly reach his farm an hour later by walking.

It was very late, however, before he reached it; the darkness had still farther depressed him, and he almost believed by the time he got to his own gate that Nancy meant to be false to him.

A noisy chorus of dogs brought a boy to the gate; it was so dark that it was impossible to make out what he was like; all that could be ascertained was that his voice was changing; sometimes he squeaked like a set of punch pipes, and then he spoke as if he had an asthma.

"Hullo, sir!" he squeaked, "it's you, is it? hold hard and I'll get a light."

He vanished in the darkness; something in his movements, in his speech, was far

more suggestive of a London Arab than of a slow, country-bred ploughboy.

He came back quickly with a lantern, and ushered Robert into a great desolate-looking kitchen with a lime-ash floor and heavy-beamed ceiling.

He lit a pair of tall candles and then he looked sharply at his master.

The gloom on the young farmer's face seemed to displease the boy; his long dark-brown eyes narrowed to a line, his heavy, dark eyebrows drew closer to each other, and his extraordinary wide, shapeless mouth twisted itself into all sorts of grimaces.

"Supper, sir?" he said in his sharp voice; "I've left you some ham, though it was so good I'd a mind to end it; and Mrs. Macgregor at the Braes sent you a cream cheese, with her respects, and a coocumber."

"There's no one up but you, Joe, I suppose?"

"You don't want no one else."

Robert Purton shrugged his shoulders, impatiently, and sat down.

"What a miserable place home is without a woman," he thought. At that moment the large, gloomy, oak-panelled kitchen, dim in the faint candlelight, was more uncomfortable—more ungenial than he had ever felt it. Joe's familiarity, which had often amused him, seemed flippant and foolish, and Joe himself, whisking about in the dark corners in his smock-frock, his black hair hanging in elf locks over his eyes, looked more like a long-legged imp than a boy.

Judging him by his voice, Joe was a boy about fifteen; judging him by his talk, his cookery, and housewifery, Joe was a grown-up man. There was nothing that he could not do except hold his tongue.

From the time that his mother, an unknown tramp, had died in one of Robert Purton's hay-fields, Joe had been received into the household at Button Court.

Robert Purton had begun housekeeping with a smart, clever woman servant, but she only stayed three months at the farm.

"I must be master in my own house," the young farmer had said, and the clever manager was packed off in a hurry. Among other imperative notions she had objected to Joe. The orphan boy had been taken home with the idea of making him useful, and in this emergency he came out in a new light.

Before the new maid was found, Joe had so developed his powers of cookery and cleaning that Robert Purton, first amused and then surprised, had decided on letting things take their course. So

months had slipped by; Joe made himself quite as useful as a woman, and was far less of a restraint; there was something companionable in the queer bright-eyed creature, so entirely self-reliant, and to all seeming so very careless about the opinion of others.

Joe managed the house and he often managed his master.

Farmers are considered self-opinionated, but everything about a farmer tends to foster self-worship: his very food is all home produce; the acres that bound in his view constitute his world; beyond its confines all is of secondary importance; it is patriotism in its essence, with self at the core. It is very hard to interest the agricultural mind in subjects that cannot be brought into the groove in which it travels—hardly a groove; in a groove there may be progress, though

only in one direction. The farmer mind may rather be likened to a swiftly-returning curve, which invariably comes back to the point whence it started; therefore, any one of quick perception and adaptable humour, not troubled with that unfortunate clearness of vision which makes justice and injustice so very distinct and insurmountable—any one possessing the more pliant and callous temperament may and will prove successful in ruling the mind under consideration, where direct opposition, founded on principle, would fail.

Robert Purton was as manly, as industrious, as persevering, as doggedly English, and as prejudiced as the best of his agricultural brothers, but as yet he was not entirely self-confident: he had been doubtful of his power of winning Nancy.

This might have been due to the truth and strength of his love, but being his

father's son, the humility of his love for the wheelwright's daughter did him honour; still the germ of the agricultural weed must have been present, or he would not have submitted so implicitly to the sway Joe maintained by his skilful reading of his master's nature.

Robert ate his supper silently and then took huge draughts from the ale-jug Joe placed beside him. The boy stood watching, seemingly intent on tormenting a squirrel in its cage, which he had roused from its sleep.

But when his master lit a bed-room candle, and went off to his room without staying to smoke his pipe as usual, Joe's eyes closed, his mouth contracted to its smallest dimensions, his whole face was a screw of curiosity.

"There's a woman in this, I'll lay—what a fool!" and then Joe snapped his fingers

with the contempt youths of his years usually entertain towards the other sex. "He's in love, is he?—he's not been like hisself for weeks—down on his luck and solemn. I'm not agoin' to have no missus here, over-ridin' me and tellin' me what I'm to do, and what I ain't; so, ma'am, I gives ye fair warning, whoever ye are;" he shook his fist and stuck out his tongue at his unseen adversary. "No, no, Robert, I ain't a goin' to play second fiddle to a missus; ye'll do well enough as ye are. I does everythink as any 'ooman can do, 'cept washin' and sewin', and them the shepherd's wife is thankful to me for providin'. My eyes, she can make gingercakes, and no mistake; a missus 'ud want maids too;" he looked utterly disgusted as the picture opened up to him; "no, not at no price; Button Court's agoin' to remain as it is, if I knows it."

CHAPTER VII.

NANCY'S PROMISE.

MR. PURTON was ill at ease. He knew that his son had intended to see Nancy Blane before he started for Dinton, and he thought it quite possible that the interview had taken place between the lovers by the time Matthew reached his home.

"And Robert is so obstinate; if he's passed his word to marry the girl, he'll consider himself pledged let what will happen. No, I must see and stop it; if it had been the other now, the fair girl with eyes so like her mother, dear me, so like, why I might have found it hard to be determined; but this one is quite different,

quite another sort of person—very good and steady, possibly, but no more a fit match for my son—than her father was for her mother." A dark look came on his face, and he sighed, and then he put a thumb into each waistcoat pocket and stood thinking.

The result of his thoughts showed itself in reaching his hat and stick, and walking leisurely into the High Street, and then down the hill towards the wheelwright's cottage.

"I've been too clever," he thought, ruefully. "I've been worrying and plaguing myself these four days, and if I'd gone down at once when I heard Blane was ill, I might have learned all about what had passed."

Years had gone by since he had paid a visit to his old associate, and a warm glow of self-satisfaction came to soothe his per-

plexity. There was something inexpressibly benevolent in the fact of the rich, looked-up-to Mr. Purton condescending to visit one who had remained where he began life, who in the way of social position had never mounted a single step of the ladder, called "getting on in the world." He stood at the garden gate a moment, and looked up at the cottage. His short upper lip curled, and he shook his head contemptuously.

"Let alone this disgrace, Robert can't take a wife out of a thatched cottage. Every generation should make a step in advance, and marriage is just one of the handy opportunities that come to a man who knows how to advance himself."

He opened the gate. As he stood in the flower-covered porch a twitch of pain compressed his lips.

"Stuff, that was different. Miriam

Hawthorn might have been a born lady so far as face and manner went, and besides, even that would have been folly. I wouldn't have been what I am if I'd married her. She was always contented. No, I shouldn't have been the man I am."

It seemed as if an echo within him sent back the words, "the man I am;" but not as he had said them, for the effect was plainly unsatisfactory.

He shook himself as if some burr or clinging brier annoyed him, and knocked at the door.

Nancy opened it, and Mr. Purton drew back a little. He might have expected to see her, and probably he had done so, but the image of her mother, Miriam, looking down from the upper window as he had last seen her—looking down with a sweet happy smile on him as he stood there burning with jealousy, sick with disgust at

the life he had chosen: this image, so vivid in its painfulness, had put everything foregone out of Mr. Purton's head.

"How's your father?" he said, jerkily; but he did not look at Nancy.

Little by little, yet scarcely in any definite form of words, Nancy had gathered the fact that Mr. Purton's anxiety to acquaint Matthew with Miriam's disgrace had been instigated by his dislike to his son's attachment to herself.

She held her head a little higher, perhaps; certainly she owed a flush on her cheek to a resolve to show Mr. Purton that she was not going to transgress his wishes.

"Father's better, thank you; he's up and dressed, and gone out on the moor."

"Ah, I'm glad of that, very glad—yes," his words came out still more jerkily, and he looked under his brows at Nancy to see how the news had affected her. The

straightforward frankness of those deep grey eyes was not soothing to his presence of mind—something in them seemed to warn off any attempt at conciliation or patronage. Mr. Purton walked on into the parlour and sat down, Nancy followed, but she stood near the door.

"Dear me," he went on briskly, "sad thing about your sister, you know, very sad. No wonder Blane feels it; it makes it worse her being so far off, don't it? Have you written or done anything?"

"I'm going to my sister," Nancy said simply; she longed to say, "tell Robert so," but what right had she to send him messages now? how could she tell that when he had heard Miriam's story he would not shrink from her as his father did? and yet the feeling was strong that he would not.

"You are going out all alone — my

good girl, you don't know what you're talking of."

"Yes, I do, Mr. Purton." Her listener looked up quickly, there was such a firm self-reliance in her words; her eyes were full of sparkling light and the flush on her cheek had deepened.

"Bless my soul, she's got more of a spirit than I gave her credit for;" and then Self stopped his admiration: "if that girl sets her mind to marry Robert, she'll have him. I know what women are; I am glad I came. Robert and she mustn't meet again if I can prevent it."

To Nancy he said with that sort of compassionate indulgence men have for women's plans, "Well, now, what do you know?"

"Nothing of myself, but—" she got very red, "Daniel Morgan has put me in the way of what I wanted to learn, and

he'll see me on board a ship and tell me how to manage. I used to know Daniel when he was little"—she fancied Mr. Purton's stare was interrogative—"we went to school together," she added, lest any distorted version of her acquaintance with Daniel should reach Robert.

"Yes, yes, I see," Mr. Purton's voice was no longer jerky, his manner was at its blandest, "a very wise plan too; Daniel has made the voyage so lately that he'll be able to give you all the information you require. Well, my girl, I can only wish you success. Many people might say you are taking a very unnecessary trouble, but in my opinion, it does you credit, it really does;" he drew nearer to her and looked confidential and mysterious. Nancy's eyes drooped, she thought he was going to speak to her of Robert. "It's a long journey," Mr. Purton's hand was busy drawing out a

pocket-book, "and I should like as an old friend of your father's—"

Her eyes flashed out suddenly, she saw the pocket-book, and before she could stop herself she pushed his hand away.

"Thank you, Mr. Purton, but I have no need to borrow of any one; I have plenty for the voyage without even troubling father."

The vehemence in her tone repulsed him more than her gesture had done. He put back the pocket-book, and patted it involuntarily.

"Well, you know best; but I should have thought, with Miriam thrown on your hands and all, you might have been glad to take a friendly help when offered; you know best of course."

Nancy had recovered herself while he spoke.

"I am obliged to you, sir, all the same,"

she said, and the deep grey eyes glittered a little; he was a coarse, purse-proud man, but he meant it kindly, and he was Robert's father.

Her gratitude came too late; money was Mr. Purton's god, and those who despised it or refused it were so many heretics with whom terms need not be kept.

The dignity with which Nancy's fearless manner had impressed him had been veiled by her sudden outburst. Mr. Purton now felt quite equal to the communication which her first greeting had checked; he was not in the habit of studying the feelings of those he did not fear.

"I'm glad I have seen you," he said, "for I'm sure you're a sensible girl, and you will quite agree with me that my son's attachment is a mistake."

There was a flush on Mr. Purton's face

—he did not know it—but he was angry with Nancy Blane. It was so difficult to make her feel her true position.

He did not look full at her, but sideways. She had grown very pale. She was trying so hard to seem calm, and unmoved before this cruel, coarse-minded man, who could stand there dragging her feelings out to the light of day.

"I don't understand you." Her words coldly spoken stung him.

"I spoke plain, too," he said, irritably. There was no bearing her cool assumption of equality. "What I mean is this—the Purtons have always been a highly respectable family—a family that never came to any disgrace in any way, and therefore, with my good-will they will keep clear of it now."

He got easier as the words came out. He threw his head back from its usual

forward bend, and looked full at Nancy. Her eyes met his proudly; her bosom heaved, her whole form seemed to dilate with the unutterable scorn she felt. Could this man be really Robert's father?

"You may make your mind easy, Mr. Purton. Disgrace will never come to you if it waits for me to bring it. I promise you I'll never marry Robert while Miriam lives in shame."

"That's right—that's well said!" and before she could prevent him he caught her hand and shook it heartily. "I was sure you were a girl of sense and spirit too—quite right!"

Nancy pulled her hand away, and clasped it to its fellow, as if she wished to prevent such friendly demonstrations.

"But I don't want to deceive you; I don't want you to think me better than I am." She smiled, something very like con-

tempt curved her lips. "I shall never leave off loving Robert—never—unless he himself wishes it."

Mr. Purton's lower jaw dropped. He had a sudden sense of being outwitted.

"Well," he spoke slowly, "I've no faith in long attachments—you would be doing yourself more justice if you turned to some one else—don't trust Robert either. I know young men better than you—he's no better than others; it's 'out of sight, out of mind' with them. I'll wish you good day."

A sudden thought stopped him at the garden-gate. "When do you start?" he said, carelessly.

"In a week about—maybe sooner."

"Good day," and he nodded, and went back to Shallerton.

She drew back into the cottage, and closed the door; and then she sank down

on a little low stool and buried her face in her hands.

She did not cry, the wound was too deep. She only sat there with a dull, aching misery at her heart—a misery that made her think if it were to last the rest of her life, life would not be endurable; and then her thoughts went to Robert. Oh, what must he not suffer, in having such a father? and this thought forced a passage for the tears that were choking her with dry sobbing efforts to get free; they brought no relief, they were so scorching—and, moreover, there was not a grain of hope in the fountain whence they came. If Robert were willing to marry her, she had fixed her fate by her own promise to Mr. Purton.

"But it makes no difference. I could not hold up my head as Robert's wife, so long as Miriam stays with this man, who

is not her husband; and even when she leaves him, I must be with her, poor darling. I must not think of self." She sat upright, and smoothed back the hair that had fallen over her face. "If I could only see him just once—to tell him all the truth myself, to let him see I do love him truly—to tell all that's in my heart! Ah, and would not that make it the harder for him to leave me—if he loves me still—if he really can love such a girl as I am?"

And here poor Nancy, who just now had felt herself so immeasurably superior to rich consequential Mr. Purton, was sunk to the depths of humiliation in the consideration of her own unworthiness beside Robert.

Gradually, as she grew calmer, a little light of comfort stole in through the thick clouds of sorrow. Miriam's story had got talked about, and many persons—thanks to

Rizpah's querulous lamentations over it—knew of Nancy's intended journey. Robert might hear of it from some neighbour, and might seek her out to say good-by; surely he could not rest satisfied with the way they had parted on that sad evening, a time which seemed far off already, to poor Nancy. Life had been so full for her during these last days. She longed to write to him, but she could not; she dared not claim his love till she knew how he had received the news about Miriam.

"He will write to me; surely he will write if he does not come."

And yet the days passed on in heart-sick expectation, and the eve of Nancy's journey came with no tidings from Robert Purton.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. PURTON HEARS MORE NEWS.

By the time Mr. Purton reached Snow Street he felt ashamed of himself. His feelings were so little sensitive that he had only a far-off perception of pain inflicted by his own words; but the heart-wrung look that had shown itself in Nancy's face remained vivid in his memory; he could not drive it away.

Mr. Purton was worldly and scheming; but though he troubled himself little about the feelings of others, he was always solicitous for the welfare of his own dependants; nature had meant him to be kind-hearted and affectionate; and some-

thing in the simple truth so unmistakeably impressed on Nancy Blane, cut through his hollow wisdom and stirred his heart.

"But after all it's right she should know it at once, else she'd go on hankering after Robert, and expecting him to marry her." He blew his nose impatiently; "why should I worry myself—what's the odds? when a thing's really done, it don't matter the way it's been done. I might have let her down more gently, perhaps; but by this time to-morrow she'll have got over it, and feel quite reconciled; so I don't see that it matters how a thing is done. Time is much more precious than mere sentimental feeling, and the shortest way of doing a thing must be the best way of doing it."

And then it occurred to Mr. Purton that, for once in his life, he had suffered

his purposes to be frustrated. He had been led away by irritation to give Nancy his opinion of his son's attachment, instead of finding out whether an engagement really existed.

"But I don't think she's the girl to keep on with it, even if there is one. Bless me, no. She's a proud one. She's got her mother's spirit, and her father's dogged, surly nature. I don't know exactly what it is, but there's something wanting in Matthew Blane; he's so confoundedly cool. I believe he'd hold his own against a duke. Nancy's got just the same way with her—so confoundedly cool."

He sate down irritated and exhausted. This "coolness," as he called it, was so provoking, that each time he tried to concentrate thought upon it, so as to discover its origin—for Mr. Purton knew how to use his brains—a mist of vexation came

between him and his subject and left him angry again.

One thing was very certain, Nancy was no fool. She was far more than a match in point of wits for his easy-going son Robert.

"They mustn't meet again before she starts, I must prevent that," said the timber-merchant, "and I must tell Robert myself about the journey. Her pride may make her give him up—but if she's determined to marry him—and no girl in her senses would let such a chance slip—she'll so get hold of him that she'll make him determined to have her in spite of me."

He plunged his hand irritably into his hair, and then got up and rang the office bell.

A small clerk, with a pen behind his ear, slanting upwards, and a nose following

the same slant, put his head through the small opening he made with the door.

"When does the afternoon train start for Stainton—just about now, eh?"

"Alteration this month—tell you in half a minute, sir." The clerk vanished, and Mr. Purton sat deploring this waste of time—only for a second—he had got his hat—brushed it, and put his requirements for one night's absence in a tiny black leather bag before the clerk reappeared.

"Here, Benjamin." He found the small clerk waiting for him, train book in hand. "I'm ready. You see the use of economy of time. Men make far more by a prudent outlay of time than by any mere money economies—never waste anything, Benjamin, and, most of all, don't waste time. No man knows in which half hour lies the opportunity which holds his fortune. Nine-tenths of folks lose it

because they haven't been watching for it. Don't you lose one to-day. I shall be back by first train to-morrow."

Mr. Purton walked off briskly to the station.

"If they'd only take it in," he said, "one might do something with these fellows—Now, at Benjamin's age I was practising economy of time. No one told me time was money—I felt it—I knew it; but then, I suppose, every one's headpiece isn't screwed on the same way. I wish Robert now had a little more self-respect in his choice of a wife."

And here Mr. Purton's reflections were pulled up short, with such a sudden pull, that his outer man yielded to the mental check. He stood still in the middle of the pavement puzzling over his own sentence —apparently the puzzle was beyond him. He hurried on to the station with a frown.

"I can't take a daughter-in-law out of a thatched cottage, that's enough!" he said; and having given himself a practical reason for his objection to Nancy Blane, although he had not solved the question touching self-respect, Mr. Purton's brows smoothed, and by the time he reached the platform he was able to exchange his usual friendly greetings with the station-master.

The train was a little after its time, and Mr. Purton walked up and down beside the big red-faced official blandly dispensing information.

"A sad story this about that pretty girl of Blane's," the station-master said. "I'm told the gentleman's connected with that young parson who lived out Dinton way some years ago."

Mr. Purton whistled.

"Mr. Llewellyn, how? in what way? dear me, you don't say so, now?" His

words tumbled out with a rapidity that bewildered his listener. Mr. Purton was piecing recollections together, and he had to jerk out sentences to make room for quickly crowding ideas.

"Well, our parson here, I was telling him about it, and when he heard the name he said, 'Brendon? why, Mrs. Llewellyn had a son, a Mr. Brendon, out in the River Plate;' he said no more than that. It may be and it mayn't; if so, the girl must have flown pretty high since she left Shallerton."

The bell crashed in upon the talk; the train came up, and Mr. Purton had to start full of surprise and perplexity.

The news he had just heard did not soften the shame or the disgrace, but somehow he felt softened towards Miriam Blane.

"Bless me, if it should be that Mr.

Brendon. Why, I remember hearing that Captain Brendon, the father, was a man of very old family indeed, and Mr. Llewellyn, poor fellow, was quite the gentleman, quite — dear me — to think of Blane's daughter getting into such a family 'any way!'"

CHAPTER IX.

MIRIAM.

THE object of Mr. Purton's thoughts was sitting on the opposite side of the globe in the patio of a house in Buenos Ayres, or rather in its suburbs.

The weather was unusually warm for the time of year, for July is a chilly month in that far-off region, and Miriam sat enjoying the sunshine in the open court; the glazed tiles of the pavement glittered as if glad of the warmth, the fountain in the centre bubbled merrily, and sent sparklets of crystal on to the stiff-leaved aloes and prickly pears placed in groups round it, and under the arches that surrounded

the court, and gave access to the house itself.

Miriam reclines in a long low chair. She is beautiful in face and form; she has fully realized the promise of her childhood; her flower-like pink and white loveliness is perfect, and the depth of expression in the dark blue eyes adds a fresh charm, and redeems it from insipidity. Her eyes swim with tenderness as she looks at her husband.

He stands leaning against one of the entrances to the house with his hands in the pockets of his loose jacket. Godfrey Brendon is a fine-looking man, not handsome, but with something very attractive in his frank manly face. At the present moment his expression is far more serious than usual; instead of the genial smile which shows his white teeth so thoroughly, his tawny moustaches droop over his

mouth, the whole face has a pensive cast.

"Godfrey, dear," says the soft sweet voice of his wife, "what are you thinking about; do you know you have been serious for quite five minutes? I can't fancy you serious when you are not smoking."

"Can't you?" he smiles brightly at her till he looks almost handsome; to Miriam he is the impersonation of manly beauty—a hero, a demigod.

"Godfrey, darling, I can't think how it is you are not a soldier; you look fit for nothing else."

He goes over to her and kisses her.

"You precious little goose; if I were a soldier you'd have to rough it in a very different way to this, but do you really want to know what I have been thinking about?"

He strokes her cheek as he speaks.

"Of course I do;" she caught his hand between her soft fingers and kissed it often while she spoke; "only if it's about money, never mind: figures always make my head ache; at least, teaching sums always did."

He frowned slightly; he hated any allusion to her former life, but another fervent kiss on his hand brought back his smile.

"No, it is that I've made up my mind to go back to England; you hate business, darling," he hesitated a moment, "so I'll not worry you with reasons—only I have quite arranged to start soon—in ten days or so."

She flushed with eager surprise.

He noticed the look in her eyes, and for the first time it occurred to him to ask her opinion. Godfrey Brendon's own will had hitherto been his sole counsellor, and certainly it would not have occurred to him to consult with a woman.

He was moved now by an impulsive

desire that Miriam should share his wishes: "You will like to go, won't you, my own pet?"

"I hardly know yet; I can't tell;" she was more lovely than ever as she fixed her eyes pensively on his face, and her lips parted, showing her small pearly teeth within them; "you see, dearest, it is so sudden;" then seeing she had not made the answer he expected, "of course I shall like it when I have taken it in, I must like everything you like, mustn't I, you darling?" she pressed his hand fondly to her, "only we are so, oh so happy, that I longed, I believe, to stay just as we are; so that our happiness might continue for ever."

His face grew more and more troubled; she went on in a gayer tone, "Don't think I'm so unnatural as not to want to see my father and dear old Nancy; I ought

to have thought of them first, oughtn't I? and yet no; you must always absorb all other thoughts—my Godfrey, my own, own, husband." She still held his hand, and now she hid her eyes in it—partly from the ardour of her intense love, partly because a strange look had come over Mr. Brendon's face, and Miriam shrank from seeing that which she dreaded.

Till now the sunshine of her happiness had not been dimmed by the faintest cloud; but she had seen enough of her husband's manner towards inferiors to be aware that his anger was not to be aroused with impunity.

She lay back in her chair trembling: "I have said nothing to vex him, I'm sure I have not;" the bride of two months felt so sure of her husband's love and confidence. She had never seen Godfrey Brendon till a few weeks before she married him, and yet

it did not occur to poor, ignorant, beautiful Miriam that her lion-like lord had any thoughts hidden away on which she might stumble and break. His silence lasted so long that she peeped up at him through the fingers of the clasping hand. He stood still as a statue, but Miriam thought he looked stern, he was frowning.

He drew his hand away, and then he changed his position slightly, to hide his face from her scrutiny.

"Women say words that they never mean to act up to;" he spoke coldly, and then he laughed a hard forced laugh. Miriam sat upright, terrified, only for an instant. She started up and threw her arms round his neck, clinging so closely that he could not free himself.

"Oh, Godfrey, you don't mean that I do this."

"Do what?" He pushed her head

back gently, and kissed her forehead. "Go and sit down again; just now you don't know what I mean or what you mean yourself. I want you to listen patiently, and like a good reasonable child."

She gave a little sigh, but she went back to her chair, and sat there with folded hands, trying to smile easily, while her lips quivered with agitation.

He cleared his throat before he spoke; he kept his eyes studiously away. Many little signs might have told Miriam that her husband was only showing her half his heart; but she loved him, and doubt never entered her soul. She only thought as he went on that he was striving how least to wound her.

"Just now you said I must always be your first thought. Now, if you really mean those words, so long as you have

me and my love, I imagine that your happiness will be complete, wherever you are placed? Am I right about your meaning?"

It was so new, so horribly new and strange to hear him speak to her in this cold matter-of-fact way, that she had nearly burst into tears; but his previous warning was too fresh to be disregarded, and her spirit rose against the restraint laid on her. She felt helpless; she could show Godfrey her love, she could make him feel it; but how could she ever explain it to him in this dreadful cold-blooded way.

"Oh, I don't know." There was a pettish, fretful ring in her words. "You know what a silly little thing I am, Godfrey. I can't say it better than I did just now; and indeed, indeed, I can't love you better though."—Here sobs and tears came in spite of her.

He made a half movement; it might have been either compassion or impatience, but he kept his head turned away.

"We are going to England, Miriam, and in England people have to live according to the rules of the society in which they move; also in England a wife takes the rank of her husband. I want you to feel that I have no personal motive in this. I only want, as you do yourself, my darling"—he spoke more tenderly, for her hard, painful breathing showed him the self-control she was trying for—"I want our happiness to last. Well, Miriam, I don't know why I am making such a business of this, for I believe you love me well enough to give up everything for me. You guess what I mean, already."

"Yes," she was calmer than he expected. After the first sharp pain had passed, she had resolutely shut her eyes to all but his

love. She guessed his meaning with painful quickness, but she would not let herself realize the cost of a life-long separation from her own people. It was true that she had left them of her free will, but she had often longed to see them again."

"You are a darling," he clasped her in his arms and kissed her passionately. "You are even more a darling than I expected," and then he murmured the fond petting words which made up the happiness of her life.

After a little he went on speaking, but not far off now; he kept his arms close round her, and her face was hidden on his shoulder.

"You will find a most devoted mother, and I fully believe, an affectionate sister, in my mother and in Norah Llewellyn. Why do you look so frightened, Miriam? I thought you said you should like Norah."

For Miriam had raised her head and was looking up at him with dilated eyes and pale cheeks.

"Ah, but that was before we were married, before I ever thought of going back. Do you know, darling, that I do not think I ever could have got courage to marry you if I had thought of you as Mr. Llewellyn's brother? Oh, I shall never get intimate with them. They will think me so beneath them."

"I do not believe it. How can they, Miriam, if you do as I tell you, and keep quiet? I have married you out here. When I made your acquaintance you were the adopted daughter of one of the principal merchants in Buenos Ayres. What farther account need you give yourself. Now you understand why I desired you not to write and acquaint your family with your marriage at present. Don't cry, my own

darling child, I can't bear it. I hate saying all this, because it hurts you, and yet you yourself see the sense of it, don't you, sweet one?" She could not speak, but she pressed the hand she held. "After all, the sacrifice is an imaginary one. When you married me you thought you should pass your whole life in Brazil, therefore it can make no actual difference to you to go back to England and let your family suppose you in Brazil. I don't say you are not giving up something, my darling. You are, and I feel very grateful to you; you cannot say any longer that you have only given me yourself."

And while Godfrey Brendon spoke he really felt a keen pang of regret that he was thus forced to grieve his sweet young wife, but the next minute he was soothing it away with self-congratulation.

What an advantage it would be for

Miriam's character to be formed by his mother.

Godfrey did a great deal of worship and duty too in theory—mentally he glorified his mother, and thought himself a most dutiful son, when he painted her in glowing colours to Miriam.

He had been careful to ascertain that his wife had never seen either of the Mrs. Llewellyns, and although he knew nothing of Norah, his mother's letters had represented her as charming. He settled that, after all, Miriam's sacrifice would be a gain to her. No lowly-born, home-bred sister, could ever be such a companion to her now as the friend she would find in Norah Llewellyn.

"As to Norah," he said with his general self-complacent smile, "I shall easily win her. I shall take Hugh under my wing. I know how she doats on that boy."

CHAPTER X.

TROUBLES.

"JOE, you're sure and certain you took a letter of mine to the post the day after I came home?"

"A-course I did. Why you asked me that once a-ready."

Joe took a slanting look at his master through his long half-closed eyelids, and set down the tea-cup he held.

Robert Purton was smoking his pipe at the entrance door, while his steaming basin of tea cooled on the long table.

Joe always made the tea and poured it out, but he usually drank his while the young farmer smoked, and amused himself

by tormenting either the squirrel or a litter of puppies, at the farther end of the room, when his master came back to the table. Joe had grown troubled and suspicious since Robert's return from Shallerton, and he preferred watching quietly, whenever he could get the chance.

Robert Purton sighed, but he took his pipe from his lips and looked fixedly at Joe when he spoke again. "And you posted another the day before yesterday?"

"Why not?" the boy made this answer with his face in his tea-cup. Setting this down with a jerk he looked at his master. "What's up now, Squire? you gave me two letters and I took 'em both. Was there money in e'er a one, as has gone and lost itself. Was there now?"

Though Joe was sitting so far off—for the entrance door came in the middle of the room, and the table end where he sat

was at its farthest extremity — Robert Purton shrank from his servant's inquisitive eyes, he turned away and faced the road again.

"No, there was no money in the letters." He looked troubled; more sorrowful than angry. His honest blue eyes were full of weariness. He had written twice to Nancy Blane—letters in which he had poured out some of the overflowing love he felt—and Robert, like many another simple man of his type, stronger in feeling than in power of ready speech, grew eloquent on paper—eloquent and touching too, for his words were not pen-made—they came straight from his heart.

Now, poor fellow, standing there thinking over what he had said in those unanswered letters, a rich flush rose in his face.

"Maybe she's offended that I should speak so free to her, or—" the flush grew

hotter,—"maybe she's laughing at the whole thing—women do laugh cruelly easy." He knocked the ash fiercely out of his pipe. "She's welcome to laugh if she has heart for it."

A vision of those grey eyes, and of the hidden fire that lay behind their modesty of expression, stirred Robert's heart and dispersed his sulkiness. He remembered, too, how Nancy clung to him in that short delicious interview.

"It's all my luck!" he said sadly. "Old Blane's a tyrant! Five minutes longer and Nancy and I would have quite understood one another." But he could not get peace even by putting the blame on Matthew.

In each of the letters he had implored Nancy to see him; he would not go to her home. Her father had forbidden this. He would not ask her to continue to meet

him in a clandestine manner; but he must see her—just once, and then she would tell him the reason of her father's sudden dislike to himself. He offered to meet her anywhere; and in his simple way he had said that his reapers were already at work, and in a few days he should be unable to leave the farm.

This he hoped would bring an immediate summons to Shallerton.

Nancy's silence was inexplicable.

A sharp, firm tread on the road roused his attention. It was so unlike the heavy slouching crunch of hobnails.

"Father! Why I never looked to see you!"

Mr. Purton was opening the gate. He looked almost handsome, as his dark eyes glowed up towards his stalwart son. He was immensely proud of Robert's inches of superior height.

"Well, Bob, it was a sudden thought. I heard news I knew you'd be interested about, and I made sure you'd not be over in Shallerton for some time yet."

"I had thought of going over soon;" and then simple Robert stops, feeling the subject difficult to get on with.

"But I see you're beginning harvest already, and couldn't leave," says his father, sharply, and then his observant eyes light upon Joe crouching over the puppies, and listening to every word.

"Hulloa, youngster, take my bag, will you, and see you've got a bed to put me in, with a mattress uppermost."

He holds the bag out so that Joe is obliged to come forward and take it, and then he says, "Look sharp," and keeps his eyes on Joe till the boy is forced to obey him.

Mr. Purton throws open the front of his

coat, sends each thumb into an arm-hole of his waistcoat, and screws his eye knowingly into a small compass.

"Clever lad, that, I make no doubt, but don't let him get too clever, Robert."

"How d'ye mean, father?—it's his cleverness I like."

"Yes, yes, my boy;" Mr. Purton gives a short chuckle of superior wisdom. "Cleverness is right enough in its place. I mean, don't trust Joe with your secrets when you've got any — he's too wide-awake by half. I've something to tell you that I don't care his hearing. You don't know the news about that poor girl Miriam—Miriam Blane?"

Robert's perplexity has made him irritable. He has listened till now in sullen silence. Joe suits him well enough, and he is not going to take up a prejudice against him; but his father's last word acts like a charm.

"What about her?" he turns round quickly, and faces Mr. Purton, his blue eyes dilated with eagerness.

"We'll go inside, my boy, and sit down," the timber-merchant speaks pompously, though kindly. He is sorry to pain his son, but there is a certain luxury in the contemplation of the news he brings; its success must be so certain.

"My dear fellow!" he says, when he has shut the door of the sitting-room, "I don't know whether you have thought any more about a certain subject discussed between us when you were last in Shallerton? Wait a bit, Robert;" he waves his hand to deprecate the interruption he sees in his son's eyes. "The Blanes have met with a sad misfortune; that pretty girl, Miriam, has got deceived into a marriage with a man who has a wife already."

Robert's lips close tightly over his clenched teeth, and his eyebrows meet in a frown. "The infernal villain," he says, "where is he?"

"Oh, out at Buenos Ayres. I don't see, you know, that it matters so much for the girl, being so far away; it's rather the disgrace brought on her people here I think of; they'll have to sell up, I fancy, and leave the place altogether."

So bright a gleam of happiness shines out of Robert's eyes that his father looks at him in dumb wonder.

"So much the better for me," he says: "they'll come here all the sooner; there's room for Blane here, and he'll soon find plenty of work about the place."

"Come here! Robert, what are you talking of?" The whites of Mr. Purton's eyes project with wonder; "you don't seem to understand. I tell you they can't

stay in Shallerton, because they're disgraced. So disgraced they can't hold their heads up. By-the-by, the other girl, Nancy, you know, is going off after her sister. I daresay she'll stop out there."

This was a suddenly improvised idea; the desperate eagerness in his son's face had scattered Mr. Purton's coolness.

"Going out to Brazil—going alone!"

Robert started out of his chair as if he were going off at once to find Nancy.

"Well, I don't know about going alone," and then Mr. Purton stopped and looked at his son.

There was so much of pent-up sorrow in the young man's eyes that a look of compassion crept over Mr. Purton's face. Robert saw it, and read it wrongly; he thought his father was keeping some yet more crushing tidings from him.

"What do you mean? tell me the rest,

father," he said, hoarsely; he could have shaken the truth out of his father.

"There now don't excite yourself, my boy, whatever good will that do? Sit down and I'll tell you. I saw Nancy Blane to-day, and she told me plump that everything was over between you and her. She said nothing should induce her to marry you."

"Nancy told you that?" Robert felt in a dream, his words came out sleepily.

"Yes,"—Mr. Purton rubbed his hands together—"she told me so herself. She said Daniel—you remember Daniel, don't you? who went soldiering—would put her in the way of getting a berth and all that on board ship. I offered to be of what use I could, but she said Daniel would do everything; they're great friends, I fancy."

"When does she start?"

"Not just yet. I'll find out if you like and let you know, though I don't quite see what difference it makes to you either. Daniel has made the journey to Brazil before, so of course he knows everything; he's grown quite a likely-looking young fellow."

Robert would not receive the idea his father strove to give him, but the words galled notwithstanding.

"Do you mean then that Nancy is going out under Daniel's charge to look for Miriam?"

There are people well-to-do in this world in point of money and repute too—people who go to church and think themselves on the way to heaven, who yet in the way of business, as they call it, think it lawful to allow their words an application which they do not truthfully possess—sometimes leading others on with false hopes, some-

times casting a slur on those guiltless of the implied error or action. Mr. Purton had this way with him. He was full of energy and determination, faint-heartedness and delay were unknown qualities when his interests required directness of action; but it was as difficult to extract from him a definite opinion or a simple answer as it is to straighten a live eel.

"Dear me, Robert, you don't suppose I asked such a question. I was really taken aback by the girl's manner. I don't know how far matters may have gone between you, but she seems very anxious there should be no mistake about her determination not to marry you. I had no idea she was so decided and free-spoken—took me quite aback, I assure you—quite."

This speech made Robert savage. It may in some way excuse Mr. Purton's carelessness of his son's feelings to say

that he had seen little of him for any time together since he had been a child, and Robert had a touch of the sea-anemone nature; he could not reveal himself easily to any one, he would not show any inner feeling at all in an uncongenial presence. To his father he was more or less a well-grown lout—industrious and persevering, and well thought of wherever he went, but a lout for all that—as little like, so Purton thought, what his father's son should have been, as the cygnet seems to the duck when at last he is hatched.

"I don't see that it matters what you think about her," Robert spoke, sulkily: "one thing's certain, I must know the rights of this. I will too."

He went out at the open door, and took no more notice of his father.

Work was over, and there was that indescribable murmur in the air—the joy-

hymn of the winged creatures, seemingly so useless, and yet such daily reminders of the blessings of the rich summer-time, reminders of the happiness laid up for us if we have but eyes to see and hearts to feel, in the bright sunshine and the sparkling dew, in the beauty of flowers and leafage, the sights and sounds that not only feast the sense, but print themselves on memory till we feel the deep reality that "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever."

Reapers came slowly up from the lower fields, with jolly golden brown faces, their beer-bottles slung at their waists; there was a happy look in many of the men's eyes; the sky was promising, the crop was a heavy one, there was every hope of getting it up speedily.

"I might run over to Shallerton and back and never be wanted," the young farmer thought, and then he knew he

must be missed. All seemed going on smoothly, and well, but he always visited each field more than once a day. How could he tell that the order that prevailed, and the progress that was made, would be the same if he neglected his duty?

"Macgregor lost a crop last year by leaving home; and yet a day, how can a day matter?"

He turned round at a movement near him; a tall heavy-shouldered man, bigger than himself, stood touching his hat.

"Well, Reynolds?"

"Well, Sir, the red Leicestershire be queerish. I'se afeard on she. Her didn't ought to calve so soon, but I'se afeard on she. Shall I rouse ye if ought goes amiss?"

"I'll go round with you now." Robert turned towards the cow-houses, which lay on the right, behind a huge yard filled with straw; in the day-time the play-place of

black and white sows and their young ones.

There was not much light in the cow-house he looked into, but Robert's eyes were practised.

"No need to rouse me, Reynolds. I'll not go to bed to-night."

He went back to the house.

His father had got into the most comfortable chair he could find, and was snoring soundly.

Robert sat down on the table and thought.

"It seems sent as an answer to my puzzle. I was in two minds as to going, but this is a plain call of duty. That poor beast may be in danger of her life for hours and hours, so ill as she's been lately. I can't leave her only with Reynolds, just now too, when there's not a hand can be spared from the fields; no, I

must stay. It's very strange Nancy has not answered my letters. I'll write once more to her, and ask her not to go without seeing me. I can't be kept here long, and then I'll leave it in God's hands."

He said it reverently, and bowed his head.

It was a part of Robert's simple nature to believe that all was directly ordered for him, however hard it sometimes was to bear, and at this moment he was able to realize his faith, and that is not always the lot of those of his way of thinking.

CHAPTER XI.

BUENOS AYRES.

"THIS is Mr. Josef, he will take you straight to Mr. Brendon's counting-house; he lives close by."

Nancy felt dazed and giddy with the din of shrill discordant noises proceeding from the quays; it was a comfort to feel that she had some one to take care of her, as she was handed into the boat.

She looked at Mr. Josef, to whom the captain had given her in charge, and she felt still more re-assured.

He was an undoubted Brazilian, dark-eyed, and intelligent-looking, with sharply-cut features.

"Are you ready?" he said, gently, as they landed, and he took Nancy's cloak and bag from her, and led her away from the harbour and its bewildering noise. "Is Mr. Brendon a friend of yours?" he asked as they walked along.

"No."

"Then you have friends to go to in Buenos Ayres after you have seen him?" Mr. Josef's dark eyes looked inquisitive.

"No." Nancy tried to steady her voice; she had only arrived that morning; she felt stupefied and downcast, utterly unable to receive the multitude of strange sights and sounds that met her senses on every side.

She had realized this moment beforehand; she had known that she must feel desolate and cast adrift on landing, but she had not looked for anything so imposing as the first sight of the city with its tall

spires and domes glittering through a fleet of shipping. Nancy had never seen any large town except Liverpool, and she had only spent a few hours there before she sailed; and as she walked on and saw the immense extent of the Brazilian city, its handsome, well-paved streets and magnificent buildings, the crowds of strangely-dressed people, she grew more and more bewildered.

Her companion had been watching her face.

"Mr. Brendon is a man of consequence out here," he said, re-assuringly; "you are quite safe in his hands."

Nancy blushed—her direct nature shrunk from any implied dependence on Mr. Brendon.

"He can be of no use to me, except in the business I came about," she said—and then she hesitated—"perhaps you

can tell me where I can get a cheap, safe lodging for a few days, till I return to England?"

Mr. Josef looked at her as if he thought her crazy.

"You surely don't mean to go back to England in a few days?"

"Yes, as soon as possible"—and then she saw that she must give some explanation of her conduct.

"I only came out here to find my sister and take her back with me."

"Could not your sister have gone to you of her own accord?"

"No, my sister is quite different to me; she is pretty and delicate, and she is used to being taken care of, and, besides, she is in trouble."

"Ah, she is very young, then; I mean younger than you are?"

The Brazilian had grown more interested.

Nancy's cautious manner was suggestive of mystery.

"No, she is rather older than I am."

Mr. Josef's eyes opened widely—

"Do you mean to tell me that you have travelled all this way for the purpose of fetching home a person who is as able to take care of herself as you are?"

"Yes; why not?" said Nancy simply.

Four or five horsemen with embroidered white trousers and gaily-coloured ponchos galloped by them on wild-looking horses, making the street clatter as they went.

"If a brother of mine were to get into trouble in London, I'm afraid he would stay in it if he waited for my help," said the Brazilian.

Nancy looked at him in surprise.

"And yet you are so kind to a stranger. Should you not care to help your brother?"

"Oh, yes, of course; but it is quite another matter to take such a journey only to serve him; you make me wonder."

"I have only done my duty," she said; "my father wished to come instead—but he is too ill."

Mr. Josef made no answer, he looked at the grave, quiet girl, with her earnest grey eyes, and he marvelled more and more at her self-devotion. "Probably this other sister is a good-for-nothing," he thought, and he pictured to himself a tale of shame and desertion; and yet, when he looked at Nancy again, her face forbade the thought that anything shameful could belong to her.

"We are near Mr. Brendon's office," he said. Nancy looked up at the great stately houses in dismay; she began to realize the difficulty of approaching Mr. Brendon.

"He won't listen to me, perhaps he won't let me see Miriam;" she glanced

down at her quiet gown—she had grown, in a moment, nervous and self-conscious.

Mr. Josef watched her closely, with the quick perception of a foreigner he partly guessed her feelings—he stopped at the corner of a street—

"This turning leads to my mother's; won't you rest and refresh yourself before you call on Mr. Brendon?"

Some Negro women with bright-coloured handkerchiefs on their heads, looked hard at Nancy as they passed, and then laughed among themselves.

"Thank you all the same, but I can't rest till I have seen Mr. Brendon;" something in the appearance of one of the Negro women had put Nancy in mind of Rizpah. The little link roused up memory and the charge she had undertaken for her father's sake. She looked at Mr. Josef, and she saw that he was pained by her

refusal — "If you really will be good enough, sir, to take me to some respectable place where I can lodge, when I have seen Mr. Brendon, I will be most thankful; for I could not stay in Mr. Brendon's house."

Mr. Josef looked delighted. "I will take you where you will be quite safe and comfortable," he said; and when at last they reached a house looking more like a public building than an ordinary place of business, Nancy felt thankful that she had such a protector.

He went in with her. The clerks in the outer office stared when she inquired for Mr. Brendon.

"Mr. Brendon is in London or nearly so —he left this more than three weeks since."

Nancy's heart beat so painfully that she could scarcely breathe, but at last she was able to speak.

"Is Mrs. Brendon gone too?"

"Oh yes." She fancied the clerk looked surprised at her question, but she scarcely knew what she thought or fancied. For a few moments the whole office went round and round with her; mechanically she stretched out her hand and caught at Mr. Josef's arm as if she were blind—

"Thank you. I will go with you now," she said.

He made no answer; his quick perception told him that there was some mystery connected with Mr. Brendon which this cold, quiet, English girl meant to keep to herself, and he led her silently to his mother's house. But as he went along he noted the scared look in Nancy's eyes and her deadly paleness.

He left her at the entrance door and went in alone. A dark handsome woman met him with open arms and vehement greetings.

"Mother," he said, as soon as he could extricate himself, "I bring you an English woman, just landed; this poor young creature finds on arriving that her friends have gone to England—the shock has been too much for her. I think you had better get her to bed at once."

"Is it real? Am I in Buenos Ayres?" thought Nancy, as she stood at the entrance. Some more horsemen came up the street at a mad gallop, and their dress, voices, and gestures answered her question. There was no possibility of fancying herself in England.

It may seem strange that in that moment of utter forlorn desolation Nancy's first thoughts should fly to the wreck of her own hopes. She had left her home without seeing Robert, without writing him one word in explanation of her journey. It had been very hard to

leave home in silence; but then she should not be long absent; she had felt sure of taking Miriam back with her, and her sister's presence would have explained all. Now what could she say or do to live down the evil report her sudden unexplained disappearance might create against her? but in the midst of this agony the thought of her father gave her comfort.

"Maybe Miriam has gone to father by now; and when he tells her the truth she'll stay with him. Oh, yes, she'll never go back to that wicked Brendon."

Nancy's meditation was here disturbed by Mrs. Josef. Her warm welcome brought tears to poor Nancy's eyes.

Meantime Mr. Josef smoked his pipe in the verandah: he smiled cheerfully as he told himself that he wanted a wife, and that this English girl would exactly suit him.

CHAPTER XII.

NEWS OF NANCY.

NANCY had been gone two days, and Rizpah sate alone in the honeysuckle porch by herself.

Seemingly not at her ease, every now and then she hitched up one shoulder, or pulled her needleful of darning-cotton close, to the detriment of the long white, bag-like stocking she was employed on—said pulling being caused by a vehement effort to dislodge an imaginary spider in her sleeve.

"Eh, drat porches!" She got up and went into the wide passage.

"Nancy seems partial to that there

porch, so I thought I'd sit there, an' it's as full o'creepy-crawley creaturs as a pup's full o' fleas; and if this ain't a spider up my sleeve, her's maybe a caterpillar, or worse."

Rizpah's long London service had made a cockney of her in habits as well as speech, although some provincialisms clung to her words. She had grown to find fault with lime-ash floors, and "insex," as she pronounced them, were the plague of her life.

She disliked the porch for two other things connected in her mind with it, thought and needlework.

Rizpah had been used to an active life, and she seldom cared to sit until she was too tired to stand, and then she was more apt to fall asleep than to indulge in reflection, or the use of the needle.

But in Nancy's absence this stocking must be mended; and by a sort of instinct

Rizpah had "cleaned herself" as she phrased it, earlier this afternoon, and had seated herself in the porch with a semi-trust that Nancy's deftness of finger might have a fixed association with the occupier of the bench under the honeysuckles.

But her needle had soon got sticky, and constant excursions up her sleeve after the "insex" had made her restless and irritable; and as we have seen, she had summed up her vexations by swearing at porches in general.

Also—although of this she was unconscious as a cause of irritation—she had no one to speak to, and she had been so used to get rid of her thoughts in words, that their presence in this unusual form depressed her.

Two large facts stood always in her way, and she felt herself unable either to grasp them, or put them on one side.

Miriam's return—and Nancy's journey, and as the first threatened to interfere much with Rizpah, it occupied the most prominent place.

"Don't tell me about bein' deceived, and so on," she grumbled; "Miriam's over twenty, and her's got plenty of wits. A much more wide-awake sort of gal all-to-pieces than what Nancy is, and the one 'll ruin the other. 'Tain't to be thought as Miriam is much good now—cast off as her'll be by that willin'—and by the time Nancy gets home again her'll be just as bad,—not a pin to choose between 'em."

Perhaps two of the most rapid processes in the female mind are the easy transitions by which a recently departed person becomes a saint, and a woman, let the scandal which has fallen on her be ever so slight, ever so much the fault of others, rather than her own, becomes at once a

sinner—a sullied faded flower henceforth to be shunned and despised.

Rizpah had even gone so far as to speak of Miriam as "a lost, misguided creature" in her father's presence; and Matthew's stern rebuke, though it kept her silent, failed to remove his sister's settled conviction that the girl was a cast-away.

This seemed the more hard, because she had always favoured Miriam, and set her up as a pattern to Nancy.

"Too much taken up with her own blue eyes, and her curls I don't doubt, to be careful of her ways," and Rizpah tried to draw herself up with severe virtue. She got a stitch in her side at this, and cried out, "Oh, lauk-a-day, my sakes, how stiff I do get to be sure;" and in the midst became aware that she had a very surprised audience to all these demonstrations in the shape of Robert Purton.

The young farmer was standing in the porch, his head bent a little forward, looking into the room.

"My gracious, only to think," gasped Rizpah, "why young Purton — Mr. I mean — begging pardon, how could you give me such a turn?"

Robert smiled—something had seemed wanting in the look of the place—the missing link that tells true sympathy so secretly and surely—the absence of that for which it yearns, and his heart had grown heavy and sorrow-laden as he stood there watching Rizpah; but the whole aspect of the woman, her stout pincushion-like figure, all awry with her sudden movement, her staring bead-like eyes and open mouth, had an absurdity in them that kept him smiling, in spite of his forebodings.

"I beg your pardon. I'm afraid I took you by surprise," he said.

But Rizpah recovered herself before he had ended, and Robert winced and grew shy again at the knowing look that came into her black eyes.

He hesitated to ask the question ready on his lips.

"I hope your brother is all right again," he said, instead.

It was easy to make Rizpah feel aggrieved, and the easiest way of all was to withhold confidence to which she considered herself entitled.

She curtsied demurely.

"Thank you, sir, him's nicely; him's close handy somewhere, smokin' his pipe. I don't doubt I'll find he."

She waddled quickly to the inner door; she knew perfectly well that Matthew was safe at the other end of Shallerton, but she had no notion of being slighted.

"Young prig—a-comin' all that way to

throw dust in my eyes. Him shall wait long enough before him gets a syllable about Nancy out of I."

Robert was too quick for her; he was anxious to avoid a meeting with Matthew Blane, and he managed to get to the door before Rizpah did.

"Oh, please, don't trouble. Can you tell me where to find your niece? I came to see her."

He reddened excessively, but he looked at her so frankly with his honest blue eyes, that Rizpah softened a little.

"Why couldn't ye say so sooner? well, then, I'm fear'd ye'll go back no wiser than ye came, young Purton."

Robert thought only of Nancy's words to his father, and the dogged determination which lay beneath his shyness rose up at once.

"I tell you I must see her; Nancy will

come down and speak to me fast enough if you say that I shall stay here till I've seen her."

He looked so sturdy, so entirely meaning his words, that Rizpah opened her mouth half in fear, half in admiration.

"Well, to be sure!" and then she changed to the pitying, half-sneering manner which she found her most successful weapon against superior strength. "Young Purton" was such a big, square-shouldered, broad-chested giant; he looked able to carry her and the cottage too, away on his shoulders if he pleased.

"You're fine and masterful, sir; but, lor', it ain't no more use than if you was to try and ride home on one of them wheels in the shed, yonder. There ain't no sense whatever in waiting for Nancy. Her's not here nor likely so to be—no, not likely, that's it, her's gone."

A cold chill crept over Robert; he had been agitated at the idea of the coming interview with Nancy, for though he would not believe his father's hints about Daniel Morgan in the way Mr. Purton wished him to believe them, still her strange silence oppressed him with a vague restlessness, but this was worse news than anything he had counted on.

"Gone to Buenos Ayres do you mean?"

"Well, yes. I don't know as her was going nowhere else," said Rizpah, irritably. "It's bad enough going out there, that I do say, a young girl and all. My sakes! when I was young, gals was kep' a deal closer than what they seems to do now."

"But Nancy's gone to her sister." Robert could not bear blame to be cast upon Nancy.

"Ah, well, I suppose I knows why her went, young Purton. I as were close beside

she, must know a sight more 'un them as lives in another county; and what good 'll it do Nancy going after Miriam, I should like to know? you may as well set one sheep on to fetch another into the pen again. I said how it 'ud be, but it don't never matter what I says."

"But" — Robert was recovering the shock the sudden news had given him— "didn't your niece leave a letter or a message of some kind for me?" He looked earnestly down into her hard black eyes.

"That I'm sure her didn't. Why, her said her and you was parted; why, bless your soul, young Purton, Nancy's that cut up about Miriam that her's not got a thought for another body in the world besides, not her." Robert felt sick at the words. "Her talks of bringing she's sister back here to live."

"Yes, of course, she would be terribly grieved. But are you quite sure now that she did not say anything about me—she knew I should call—she left an answer for me?" he said, questioningly.

"Answer to what?" Rizpah looked so inquisitive that Robert got ill at ease again.

"Oh," he said, awkwardly, "I wrote to her, that's all, and I have been expecting to hear from her. When do you look for her home again?"

"That's more than I can tell. Who's to say her don't stop out there; most seem to as goes. Daniel 'ud tell you best if you come across he. Him's safe to be loafing somewhere about of afternoons."

"I'll ask him—thank you"—and though Robert had scorned his father's hints, his weak human heart felt considerably comforted by the certainty that Nancy was not travelling under Daniel's protection.

He was a good way down the garden when Rizpah called after him. She was half afraid of him, but her inquisitiveness got the better of her prudence.

"I say, Mr. Robert, did you mean as you'd wrote letters to Nancy and her'd not answered 'em back?"

"I said so, didn't I?" Robert only half turned; he felt surly at her inquisitiveness.

"Well to be sure," she said. "That's worse than I expected. You may depend, young Purton, her'll never come back no more."

Robert felt as if he could stifle the words on her lips—they were so full of evil foreboding.

He did not believe in one of Rizpah's surmises, but he could no longer cherish the hope that Nancy loved him. If she had any love she would have left some token for him. He had walked down the

slope from Shallerton agitated and ill at ease; but still, through all the clouds of doubt and anxiety caused by Nancy's silence, there had been the assurance of her love. Robert thought that Nancy's words to his father might have been drawn from her by Mr. Purton's manner.

He went up the slope again with bent head, and a heavy overcast face—his whole aspect changed.

"How strangely one deceives oneself," he thought; "how is one ever to be sure that a conviction is genuine? Why, I believed so in her love I could have pledged my soul on her truth—I trusted her so that I thought she was as sorry to be interrupted as I was, and instead of that she was glad." A flush of mortification crept over his face. "It comes back to me now, that she stood by her father against me even then. What a vain dolt

I have been all this time to think she loved me"—here he went on searching for fresh doubts, and they came too readily. "If she'd loved me ever so little, of course she'd have known I should write. It wasn't likely I should leave things to chance between us. Why couldn't she have sent back the first letter I wrote?" he said, bitterly at last, for his whole nature was wrung by the cruel belief that was growing into certainty. "I suppose she tore them up as they came, without so much as reading one; it's my own fault for speaking; I called myself a shilly-shallying fool for waiting so long before I spoke, and I see now my hesitation was a warning, it would have guided me right if I'd listened to it. Why didn't she stop me at once?"—here he paused—again he remembered with a glow of delight how Nancy had clung to him, and hidden her

face on his shoulder. A groan that burst from him roused him to perceive that he was in Shallerton again, and he had to gulp down a great lump in his throat and restrain the impulse to give vent to some of the agony of doubt that tortured him.

He was in no mood to call on his father, and he passed the end of Snow Street without even turning his head.

Rizpah watched him out of sight, then went back to her work with a grunt.

"Poor young chap, him seems mortal vexed; I be a bit sorry for he; and to think o' that shy gal getting letters and not lettin' on to a soul. Why, her must ha' gone to meet the postman, that her must, for I'm certain sure I was always a-watchin'."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MONTGOMERYS.

A WEEK or two later Mrs. Llewellyn received a letter from Buenos Ayres :—

"MY DARLING MOTHER,—

"I AM going to surprise you. Very soon after you get this letter you may expect to see us. I must ask you to take us in for a few days till we find settled quarters. In my last letter I said you would soon have news, and this mention of 'us' and 'we' will help you to guess what the news is. I am bringing you

home a daughter, dearest mother—the most darling little wife possible—very young and very shy. I tell her she will find a loving mother and sister in you and Norah. Am I right? Now that I have really decided on going home, it seems wonderful I have been able to stay away so long. I am impatient to see you, darling mother, and my sweet sister Norah and her boy. I fancy Myra and Hugh will be great allies.

"I cannot fix any date for our arrival, but it will not be long delayed; till then, good-by.

"Your loving son,

"GODFREY BRENDON.

"*Mrs. Llewellyn.*"

The day after the foregoing letter reached the cottage, Miss Montgomery got this note from her aunt Norah :—

"My dear Clara,—

"I am very sorry to put off your visit, but it cannot be helped. Mrs. Llewellyn has just heard from Mr. Brendon that he may be here very soon; but we scarcely imagine they will pay us a long visit; so, dear, you must come as soon as we have room for you; if you don't I shall think you are affronted with me for putting you off. I am so really sorry about it."

Miss Montgomery sat opposite her father at breakfast.

She read her letter aloud thus far, with an unmoved calm on her fair handsome face—the news having evidently far more interest for her mother, a small eager-looking woman, sitting behind the tea-urn on the right.

Clara Montgomery laid the letter down

with a smile that was more haughty than genial.

"'Really sorry!' No, my dear little aunt Norah, you are not really sorry, only you think if I were at the cottage, Godfrey Brendon could not come there."

"Oh, my dear, hush, pray; perhaps Norah is glad to have Mr. Brendon there."

"I know better, mamma." Clara spoke with a kind of iron weight—a tone indicating such self-reliance in the speaker that instinctively the more timid mind yields itself at discretion. "Last year when I was down at the cottage, aunt Norah let me see her dislike to Mr. Brendon."

"Doesn't she say they won't stay long; who is 'they,' I wonder?"

Mrs. Montgomery raised her eyes to her husband, but he had sheltered himself behind his *Times*, and the appealing glance was wasted.

Not that the glance was very effective; nature never intended Mrs. Spencer Montgomery's eyes for that sort of thing; they were dull, and had no particular colour. Altogether she belonged to the type of women so often to be met with, women who are possibly very estimable, who may be, for aught we know about them, heroines in private life, and yet of whom, when we discuss the guests we have met overnight, we probably say, "Mrs. Brown, which was she? I never noticed her," or else, "Mrs. Brown was that dowdy little woman in lilac silk, who sat on a sofa all the evening, and never spoke."

Mrs. Montgomery had always been thin and small, with a half-formed, ill-assured manner. She was the daughter of a rich citizen, who had retired to the country tolerably early in life. He had found

squiredom up-hill work in —— shire, and had been thankful to accept Spencer Montgomery for a son-in-law, though he was only a briefless barrister, because he was descended from an ancient family, and looked and spoke like a gentleman.

Mrs. Montgomery worshipped her husband, and he condescended to permit this worship, and to be proud of the only child born to him—his well-grown, handsome daughter Clara.

Mrs. Montgomery, happily for herself, was elastic in temperament. No amount of snubbing could prevent a rebound of spirits when the rebuke for her inadvertencies was over. She strove hard to fall into the groove of behaviour prescribed by her husband; but though she had been carefully educated and used to all the outside refinements of life, she had never succeeded in acquiring ease of manner.

It may be, if she had been less severely snubbed in private for her trifling errors, she might have grown more self-reliant, and so have lost the self-conscious timidity which made her so limp in her manner to strangers from actual anxiety to do right.

However this might be, people had a way of laughing at "poor blundering Mrs. Montgomery," and yet she was a dutiful loving wife, an affectionate mother, and a most careful housekeeper. Perhaps the laugh might not have been so general if her own daughter had not headed it.

"Clara dear," Mrs. Montgomery repeated, "doesn't your aunt say 'they'?"

The *Times* rustled aside, and showed Mr. Montgomery's fretful refined face narrowed by a frown.

"How can you be such a fool, Louisa? of course it means that Godfrey Brendon is married."

A groan seemed to go behind the *Times* with the master of the house; his wife waited till she thought he must be reading, and then she began again.

"Clara, dear, do finish your letter: perhaps there's a postscript to say he is married."

Miss Montgomery threw back her head with the action only possessed by tall, erect, cold-looking women.

"There is no postscript, and there never is much of anything in aunt Norah's letters except 'sugar and spice,' and the rest of the things little girls are made of. She's such a sweet, soft little goose."

"Ah, Clara, you shouldn't; she's your own aunt, you know, a Montgomery too. I've not seen her for years, but I believe she's lovely."

Mrs. Montgomery gave a little sigh, and then comforted herself by rubbing her soft,

plump, white hands together—her hands were really a good point—white hands and a small head having been as essential requirements as an income in Spencer Montgomery's choice of a wife.

"Don't, mamma," says Clara; "it is so like a washerwoman."

The *Times* rustles warningly, and Mrs. Montgomery's hands vanish under the table.

"Let me see your letter, Clara," comes from behind the newspaper. Mr. Montgomery has been suffering much from curiosity; but then curiosity is too weak a feeling to exhibit before inferiors—

He reads the letter behind his paper screen; dignity is as essential to him as it is to a ragged hidalgo.

Having read it, he lays down the newspaper and rises from table.

Spencer Montgomery has been hand-

some once on a time; he has a well-shaped, well-placed head, though it is too small; he is not like his sister Norah: his eyes are blue, or "have been" that colour, and this "has-been" aspect is that which characterizes him generally; even the elaborate arrangement of his hair and whiskers, which are evidently dyed, is old-fashioned; there is in him a certain apparent self-consciousness that draws attention to details which would otherwise escape notice. His eyes as he reads draw up into a sort of honeycomb, the fine net-work of wrinkles that surrounds them. It is not wonderful that he should idolize his daughter Clara—she is a beautiful edition of himself, so tall that she fairly rivals him, and Mr. Montgomery is of fair middle height. But the sneer which they both share, in him is modified now by a droop at each corner of his mouth.

"Just what I expected," he says, with decision. "Brendon is married and young Hugh will not get his money—exactly what I told Norah would happen when she persisted in shutting herself up with that strong-willed, masculine old woman, a nice prospect for her boy; she has not made a single friend—how can she, living the sort of prison life she does?"

"Oh, yes, dear;"—his wife speaks with incautious abruptness—"Clara says a good many people call at the cottage, there are the Watsons."

Mr. Montgomery looks straight over his wife's head and goes on speaking, "She has not made the acquaintance of a single person of position, whereas, if she had come and lived with us, she might have married and have had a suitable establishment of her own, but women are such fools. I foresaw this exactly, and now she

will have to do the best way she can for Hugh; she never would take advice."

"But indeed, Spencer, dear," Mrs. Montgomery's unselfishness goes on pleading for her sister-in-law, "they have quite a nice establishment at the cottage—a cook, a housemaid, and a parlour-maid who waits on Norah, and—"

Mr. Montgomery never looks at those to whom he administers reproof.

"Nonsense; if Norah had made the marriage she was entitled to make, originally, she would never have sunk in the social scale as she has sunk; really, Louisa, you talk of things you know nothing about. I consider Norah has acted most selfishly; first in marrying a mere country parson with a moderate income, and then in burying herself away from those nearest and dearest to her; if she cannot appreciate the refinement and

position she might have had here, surely sympathy and association should go for something. What sympathy can she find in that old woman—just the mother of her husband—a mere connection ?"

He waved his hand—the subject was dismissed. He went off to his study. Mr. Montgomery rarely conversed with his family: he gave them his opinions and left them to be digested and acted on; he liked his daughter to give him hers, but he took them in silently.

He had never forgiven his sister's refusal to put herself under his yoke.

He folded the letter, replaced it in its envelope—he was very precise in his habits—and then he put both hands in his pockets.

"Such a great, coarse fellow that Brendon," he looked down at his small feet; he had a way of considering others so as

to enhance his own good points; "he's sure to have married some high-coloured, full-blown beauty out there—some adventuress, most likely, and Norah will have to associate with this person, to go into society with her; and then there will be children, and Hugh's expectations come to nothing—just what I anticipated. I never could understand Norah. To give up voluntarily, as she did, the refinement and position she might have had here—the only right and proper place for her, of course," he said, in his most imperious manner.

Mr. Montgomery held the notion that the members of a person's own family are that person's fittest companions and associates; no matter how great the difference which education, or circumstances, or nature may have created between them—the word "ought" was very potent with him;

he could not appreciate the difference between natural love and the far more intense affection grounded on full sympathy; an affection which, when united to that engendered by nature, makes love unutterable. If he had sounded his own love for his wife, he might have learned that affection is not to be coerced by mere laws of duty where there is a total absence of sympathy; but then self-knowledge, except so much as ended in a gratifying self-contemplation, was unknown to Mr. Montgomery. It is hard to say of what his knowledge consisted. He had a study and it had books in it, and he sat there in the morning and read the paper, and sometimes the lighter articles of a review or a magazine; but he talked vaguely and mysteriously of his reading: so the "world" imagined it was very choice indeed.

Sometimes he went to his chambers in

Lincoln's Inn, but no one knew what he did there; Clara said he went to smoke. He belonged to a club, but he was not popular. In London, men who hold themselves made of finer clay than their neighbours are apt to get often sent to the wall when they have no qualities, social or otherwise, to support their pretensions with. Mr. Montgomery never came home in so bad a humour as when he had spent an afternoon at his club.

He would, for once in his life, have been wise if he had taken his wife's advice and gone to live a little way out of London.

In a small town or a village, his pretensions would have been respected, and probably the amount of airs he gave himself would have been an evidence of true merit to the provincial mind; but in London, as he had no wealth to support

his pretensions, he was nobody, and as he always saw things as they should be, not as they exist, he lived in a perpetual state of injury, from inability to attain the consideration he felt himself entitled to receive.

He remembered now that a daily visitor at the club, a Mr. Bracebridge, had often spoken to him of Godfrey Brendon, and evidently kept up some kind of a correspondence with him.

"I'll go down to the club after luncheon; for Norah's sake I ought to learn what sort of a marriage he has made. I don't expect Bracebridge has left town yet."

He walked down to the club and found Mr. Bracebridge there; but Mr. Bracebridge had not heard of his friend's marriage.

"You are sure there is no mistake, I suppose?"

"I can only say I heard from Brendon

about three months ago; he mentioned nothing about marrying."

Mr. Bracebridge was a placid, lazy-looking man of five-and-forty, who thought life far too important and pleasant to be disturbed by casual anxieties.

"Well, my sister says 'they' in speaking of the expected arrival."

Mr. Bracebridge leaned back and laughed softly—

"My good fellow, how can you take up such an idea? 'they' may mean anything—servants, or a friend, or monkeys. A man doesn't bring a wife home to his mother without announcing her arrival; at least, I don't fancy Brendon would."

"Don't you?" said Montgomery, with his contemptuous smile.

"No, I don't," said Mr. Bracebridge, coolly; he did not like the implied sneer at his friend.

Mr. Montgomery went home more perplexed than he came out.

Godfrey Brendon had either made a disgraceful match or he was a fool.

"Well, in either case he must be a fool," said Montgomery, decisively; "a man don't write to his intimate friend and keep his marriage a secret unless he's ashamed of it, and even then he's a fool, for in that case he should have been as open as possible, to avert rumour and inquiry. Why, when I married, if I had let a soul suppose I was ashamed of Louisa's want of family connection, I should have been looked down upon directly; but then, of course, I should be likely to do things differently from a vulgar fellow like Brendon."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN ARRIVAL.

"NORAH—Norah—they are coming—I can see them!" Mrs. Llewellyn called this up to her daughter's bed-room, and then set off running in the most excited and unusual manner to the gate.

Norah hesitated a moment before she went to the window.

"Better let them get over the first meeting;" and a strange sense of renewed loneliness crept into her widowed heart.

"I can be nothing to Mrs. Llewellyn beside her own son"—she checked herself. "How unjust I am to poor mamma—should I not be just the same? What

could any one be to me in comparison of my own boy? My Hughie—no one can ever come between him and his mother!"

Her eyes glowed, and yet a thrill went through her loving heart with the thought.

There he was—there was Hughie himself running forward to meet his grannie, with bright excited eyes; he was breathless with eagerness, he could only take Mrs. Llewellyn by the arm, and show her two figures coming up the wooded slope from the river—figures that seemed to be bringing sunshine through the wood as golden glints fell on the man's tawny beard and the girl's bright costume.

"How very gaily she dresses!" Norah thought.

It was a pity she had remained at her bedroom window. In the happy group—one of it—she must have shared the eager sympathy—she would have been carried

out of herself by the touching intense love with which the mother folded first her son, and then her new daughter in her arms; and the passionate affection shown by Godfrey towards his mother; and the sweet humility of his wife would have opened Norah's loving heart to them. If a child sets his right foot foremost when he first tries to walk, tradition avers he will go through life without stumbling; and if Norah had taken this new step in her life differently, she might have escaped sorrow; and yet, who knows certainly that the result would have been other than it proved?

She stood hesitating till the whole party had crossed the lawn.

"I must go, I suppose," she said, and then, choking back her strange unwillingness, she went downstairs.

The drawing-room at the cottage was

very pretty; it had two bow windows, one looking over the dashing foaming river: the other on the lawn, to which it served as outlet; drooping muslin curtains, and the flowered verandah tried to keep off the sunshine, but it streamed in nevertheless, flecking the room with gold as its light fell on picture-frames and étagères, and books nestling on little brass-rimmed tables, and the tiny treasures which Norah loved to gather round her.

But to-day the sunlight seemed to be as human as Phœbus himself must have been; it was concentrated with loving warmth on Mrs. Brendon's wreaths of golden hair; and as Norah came in the rich glow was the first object that caught her notice.

Godfrey Brendon took both Norah's hands and kissed her, without waiting for any introduction.

"You are just what I expected," he said,

admiringly; "you quite realize my mother's 'sweet Norah'—you will be a sister to Myra, I am sure."

He drew Norah towards his wife. Norah was blushing still from the hearty abruptness of Mr. Brendon's greeting; but Miriam, or Myra, as her husband called her, had turned deadly pale. Norah kissed her, and was struck by her cold manner—so unlike her husband's.

"I feel grateful to you," Mr. Brendon said, "for giving me such a nephew. We shall be great friends, shan't we, Hugh? I mean to take all the trouble of the young rascal off your hands, Norah."

"Thank you, but Hughie has not been a trouble to us." Norah smiled; she felt that this great rough-looking man was not the Mentor she coveted for her boy.

"Then it's time he begun." Brendon laughed and put his arm over Hugh's

shoulder. "You mustn't be tied to your mother's apron-string any longer, young one. You gave me plenty of freedom at his age, eh, mother dear?"

Mr. Brendon went up to his mother and kissed her so affectionately, that Norah struggled against her half-formed dislike. She turned to her new sister-in-law, and began to talk about their voyage home.

There was a flutter, a nervous unrest in Mrs. Brendon's manner that checked all approach to intimacy; and yet she did not seem timid: even in her movements this disquiet was obvious. She buttoned her gloves and fidgeted with each separate finger. One minute she was settling her bonnet-strings, and then she clasped her hands in her lap. There was no repose in the lovely creature, and Norah's fastidious eyes grew more and more discontented.

She glanced towards her mother-in-law,

but Mrs. Llewellyn sat entranced, one hand clasped in her son's, the other laid caressingly on the head of her grandson kneeling beside her chair. Hugh's eyes were fixed on his uncle; his lips were parted with intense interest. Mr. Brendon was telling the story of his capture by guachos soon after his arrival in Brazil.

When the tale ended the boy started up.

"Oh, uncle, you're going back, aren't you—you'll take me with you?"

Norah's lips pressed tightly together, and the colour faded out of her face.

"Never you fear, Hugh—we'll see plenty of life together without going to Brazil. How old are you? fifteen?"

Hugh blushed like a girl, and his head drooped.

"I'm only twelve." His voice was as sad as if he were confessing a sin.

Godfrey Brendon laughed heartily.

"Come along, my boy. You must show me the house your grandmother thinks we can have. You'll stay here, won't you, Myra, till I come back?"

Mrs. Brendon got up hurriedly.

"Oh please let me go with you, Godfrey, I—I should so like to see the house."

"Just as you please," he said, and then he looked at Hugh. "I say, young fellow, haven't I brought you a pretty playfellow —haven't you any compliments for your new aunt?"

Hugh looked up at the lovely face with the wondering admiration one only sees in a boy; then he said simply—

"I don't see how one could pay you a compliment—it would be truth, you are so pretty."

"Bravo, Hugh! Myra, you must give him a kiss after that. Come along, both of you."

Myra did as she was bid; it seemed to Norah that Hugh was fascinated by his aunt's face; he never took his eyes from it.

Norah could not stay to hear Mrs. Llewellyn's comments. She followed the others out of the room, and then escaped upstairs.

CHAPTER XV.

JEALOUSY.

BROTHERS and sisters are sometimes kept asunder—not estranged, but deprived of that heart to heart sympathy so priceless, so unutterably dear, a sympathy which will keep even the world-hardening heart young and tender against its will, by the freshness with which it maintains childhood and youth in visible existence. They are kept mentally asunder because one sees in the other the overgrowth of opinions or habits which repel; and yet there may be in each a latent possession of the very same opinion or habit, only waiting to be called out by circumstances.

Norah had always shrunk from her brother Spencer because of his pride to others; and yet she had shrunk still more when he married into a family less refined than his own, for the sake of money, and the increased position it brought.

Norah could not have married her inferior in birth or breeding, but she never dreamed that she was proud.

Life had gone on so tranquilly for her since the first great grief of her husband's death, that she had found slight temptation in it. Mrs. Llewellyn at times made hasty speeches, and Hugh was self-willed and troublesome; but very little had happened to ruffle what Clara Montgomery called the "sweet insipidity" of Norah's temper.

So that to-day, when she hurried up to her room to be free and alone with her thoughts, she found herself a new woman,

utterly moved out of herself, or that which she had considered herself, by the sudden tempest of anger and mortification and jealousy that beset her. Yes, jealousy—the heart-breaking jealousy of seeing Hugh, for the first time, leave her in open preference for his new aunt, Myra Brendon.

"He never left me before without a kiss," she sobbed, "and now he has gone without even a look. Oh, Hugh, darling husband, am I to lose all you have left me, our boy's love?"

She paused, trying to calm herself—her own vehemence frightened her.

"I don't like her; I can't; and how can Hughie like a person from whom I shrink. She is pretty and winning, but she is not a lady, I am sure she is not. A lady would not have married that man. Oh, my darling, how well I understand now your want of sympathy with your brother."

A tap at the door startled her; she dried her tears, but she could not get rid of her red eyelids. There was no help for it—she went and opened the door to Mrs. Llewellyn.

"Why, Norah, what's the matter? Ah, poor soul—yes, yes"—and then she stroked Norah's cheek and went on to herself, "Godfrey reminds her of poor Hugh, of course, though I never could see any likeness; and then seeing him and Myra together—yes, yes—it is very trying." Mrs. Llewellyn felt remorseful at her own joy in presence of the younger woman's sorrow. "Well, Norah, dear," she said, lovingly, "what do you think of Myra? Isn't she the very prettiest creature you ever saw?"

"She is very pretty;" poor Norah could not get the words out heartily.

"She's perfectly charming—why, Norah, I thought you would be delighted with her."

Mrs. Llewellyn's ears were very quick; she felt the want of sympathy in her daughter's voice, and just now she was yearning for sympathy; she was in the thrill of intoxication which happiness brings to strong natures, and she had come to ease her full heart, sure of Norah's helping love. "What is it you don't like?" she said, reproachfully.

"Dear mamma"—poor Norah's tears were trying to break forth again—"I did not say I disliked anything. I,"—here she stopped—she could not confess that she had been crying because Hugh had gone out without kissing her. "I only thought," Mrs. Llewellyn's bent brows forced some of the truth from her, "that she is not quite at ease—but she is shy very likely."

Strong feeling, baulked in one direction, is sure to take another. One winter heavy rains had fallen, and the water came down from the mountains, boiling, rushing, carry-

ing everything before it till all passage was blocked in the rocky river-bed. If the Spar could only have forced its way along, it probably would have done no greater mischief than the dislodgment of some of the huge grey stones that stayed its course; but turned a-field to work its will, it did sad damage, flooded cottages, destroyed newly-set crops, and bore off cattle of all kinds to drown in the sea below.

Mrs. Llewellyn's eyes flashed with quite a new light in them. She was thoroughly indignant.

"Shy!—very likely—enough to make a young girl shy, I fancy, to be brought all this way from home, and presented to her husband's relations all at once. Shy! well, my dear, I should think there was something wanting in her if she were not shy. There is nothing like prejudice, Norah; you always have been prejudiced against

my poor Godfrey, so, I suppose, I can't expect anything else towards his wife; but really I did not think you would blame this poor child for being shy."

Mrs. Llewellyn did not wait for an answer; she walked off to her own room, holding her head up even more stiffly than usual, and rustling her skirts as she went.

Norah stood still—she did not cry—her heart ached too sorely for tears. Mrs. Llewellyn's occasional bursts of haste were always painful to Norah's gentle nature, but hitherto there had never been a living root to them. This was different.

It seemed to Norah that Godfrey Brendon and his wife had come to rob her of all peace, of her mother's love, and her boy's clinging worship—all she had left to live for.

"I can never meet them again, easily. Mamma will always be on the watch to

see how I treat Mrs. Brendon, and I know if that man tries to influence Hughie I shall interfere—I can't help it. Hughie is quite disposed to be wild and self-willed without any teaching. Oh, will they stay here always?" she murmured.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CLOUD.

THE large house farther up the river was all that could be desired; it was to be let furnished, and Mr. Brendon took it for a twelvemonth.

"It will be jolly living all together, my mother, Norah, and all of us, won't it, darling? then when I'm away you will never be alone."

He said this to his wife on the morning after their arrival; he had taken her out with him into the wood beside the river.

"But, Godfrey, you will never go away. I could not bear it."

There was a new tone in Myra's voice,

a sadness her husband had never before noticed; he had been sitting watching the foaming, restless water; he roused out of the dreamy feeling its noise had brought, and looked at his wife.

"Yes, you could, my pet, and you will love me all the better when I come back."

"You know I can't love you better, Godfrey, and I like to live all alone with you best."

He had kept his eyes fixed on her face; she was pouting, and tears came trickling down her cheeks. He chafed at this, but he checked his impatience.

"You ungrateful little puss. I believe my mother is twice as fond of you as she is of me."

"*She* is kind," said Myra.

"And who isn't, I should like to know? you are spoiled, darling; in every way it will be good for you to see a good deal of

them; my mother will teach you housekeeping, and Norah will teach you anything else you want to know."

"I don't want to know anything," sobbed Myra; "I only want to be with you, to have our home to ourselves. Oh, I knew when we came to England we should never, never be as happy again."

"What do you mean?" Godfrey Brendon was as much dismayed as he was angry; he had fancied his wife free from foolish womanish ways; of all things he hated contradiction and squabbles as he called them.

"Oh don't be angry, please don't." Myra's tears blinded her. She could not see the cloud on his face, but she felt the anger in his voice. "Indeed, darling, I could not live with Mrs. Hugh Llewellyn. I can't get on with her at all."

"Myra! what on earth do you mean?"

he spoke fiercely, and then looking down at her trembling figure and bowed head he checked himself. "I'm sure Norah's a very sweet ladylike woman."

Myra's tears suddenly ceased. She raised her head, and the pout came back on her red lips.

"Ah, that's what I feel, and that's why you want her to live with us, and if you do, instead of copying her ways, I shall hate her. I know I shall."

"Myra!"

But Myra seemed possessed; her fear lest Godfrey should insist on this new idea so exaggerated her dislike, that for the moment it was easier to brave even her husband's anger than to submit to Norah's companionship.

"I can't help it. I know how superior she is to me, but she does not like me at all, and she has made *you* dissatisfied with

me; you did not want me to learn of any one before we came here. Oh, Godfrey, darling, you knew I was not a fine lady when you married me. I told you all the truth, and if you won't let me have my own sister, I don't think you ought to force a person on me I don't like at all."

Brendon had risen up; he was standing on a piece of rock, and he stamped hard on it.

"Don't be so very silly; would you go back to your own home now if I offered to take you with me?"

Myra hesitated a minute, and then the picture of the small cottage, with its lime-ash floors and whitewashed bed-rooms, came clearly before her.

She gave a little shudder. "No, oh, no."

"Well then what do you mean by being so silly?" he said angrily; "you cannot stand half-way; you must belong to your

own people or to mine, and those little refinements that Norah has would make you perfect if you would not be so prejudiced. I don't know why I am so foolish as to discuss the matter at all. My mother and Norah must live with us; it will be better every way, and now don't let me hear any more about it."

He moved on into the wood.

Miriam sat a minute longer, and then she sprang up and followed him. Before her marriage she had scarcely ever yielded her will to do that which she disliked; and now every word her husband said roused into activity the resistance to that which she disliked, which her late life of petted happiness had put to sleep. She never thought of struggling against her own will, but she set all her strength, all her belief in her husband's love for her, to make him listen to her pleading.

She ran after him heedless of the fragments of rocks and the tree-stumps which made careful steps so necessary, for the wood sloped down in very perpendicular fashion to the river-bed, and the path winding in and out among the trees was narrow and uneven.

He stopped when he heard her hasty steps, just in time to catch her in his arms as her foot caught against a stone, and sent her falling forwards.

"My dear child, you must not be so wild," he said, gravely; "if I had not been near, nothing could have saved you from a serious fall." He pointed down to the huge masses of rock in the river-bed.

Myra trembled and clung to him, and put up her mouth to be kissed, and then she hid her face on his shoulder and burst into tears.

"I couldn't help running, darling," she

whispered; "you had gone away from me angry, and I felt as if I should die."

Her husband had repented his harshness; and when he felt her heaving sobs, and lifting her face tenderly, saw that it was covered with tears, he seemed to himself like a criminal. Still his anger was not appeased—it looked about for a fresh victim.

He soothed Myra, and petted her; and at last the tears were dried, and she smiled up in his face again.

"It is such a sweet baby," he said, fondly patting her cheek, "that I have half a mind to scold it. Now, tell me quietly, darling, how it is you can't take to Norah?"

"I was not only crying about her." Myra looked up at her husband with eyes so full of passionate love that he forgot everything. "But, darling, it would be

so dreadful never to be alone with you; and, besides, I shall be much more likely to try and learn from Mrs. Hugh Llewellyn if she is not with me constantly; and then there is another reason—"

"How wise we are growing!" He put her hand into his arm and looked down yet closer intoher lovely face, wondering how he could be such a fool as to wish anything changed in her fresh artlessness. "Well, what is this other reason?"

"I don't half like telling you, darling; it seems unkind—but indeed I don't mean to be unkind," said Myra. And she did not mean it, but she longed to break down the exalted opinion her husband had formed of Norah.

"Come, out with it," he said, impatiently.

"Well, then, it's about Hugh. I do love him so, darling; I'm sure he's like what you were when you were a boy; and

I'm quite sure his mother will try to keep him from loving me; and I can't help Hugh's being fond of me, can I? and if we live together, you know, this would be so uncomfortable."

Her sweet blue eyes looked so innocent as they were raised to his, that he again wondered how he could wish for any change in her; and his unappeased anger flamed out at Norah's coldness.

"Jealous of you with Hugh, is she? I fancied she seemed only half pleased when I said I'd take him off her hands; but I believe you're right, my pet. Hugh will soon be fonder of our house than of the cottage; and I'm mistaken in him if Norah can tie him to her apron-string against his will."

They had been coming down the path again and had reached the cottage on the farther side from the lawn. There was a

gate on this side also, and within it a gravelled walk led between the criss-cross fence and the projecting bow window.

Godfrey Brendon opened the little gate for his wife to pass in, and then watched her along the walk; but he did not follow her.

He went back into the wood, sorely ruffled both from the vexation he had given vent to, and the anger he had held in check. It was new to him to keep any feeling under control.

His bright, frank face was positively gloomy as he went slowly along.

"It's that confounded fine-ladyishness which is the curse of women. I do believe it makes them spiteful if they fancy a want of it in one of themselves—I'm not blind. I can see that that quiet easy grace of Norah's would make Myra everything I could wish—it's all she wants; but I'm not going to have her

teased; it's just like my brother all over again. How I used to try to be good friends and jolly with the poor fellow; and how he was always throwing cold water over me about roughness and rubbish. Poor little Myra, I believe that sort of perpetual freezing would make her stiff and timid! I'd far rather keep her natural and unconventional. I was quite taken in by Norah. I thought she was shy, and I should have gone on making much of her, and trying to get better friends. Cold-hearted puss! who is she that she should give herself airs! The more reason for doing what I can for the boy. She'll fill his head with her nonsense next! Curse all women—there's no freedom for a fellow once he's tied to them!"

A heavy sigh burst from him. For a moment he wished he had stayed in South

America, far out of reach of these petty family jars that filled him with pain as well as anger. But this was not a thought to cherish. He shook his head.

"No, that could not have been managed —my marriage would soon have got known. Here no one knows us; and if a report about that woman should reach England, it is not likely to get to Myra's ears, or my mother's, or Norah's; by the time I want to introduce Myra into society—if I ever do such a thing—it will all be forgotten, and that woman will have got married too."

CHAPTER XVII.

HOME AGAIN.

NANCY could not realize her disappointment; her mind was completely filled by one thought—the best way of getting back to England.

She questioned Mr. Josef, but his manner puzzled her. All his zeal and energy in her service had departed; he gave listless, doubtful answers; at last he said—

"There is no chance: you can't sail for England for another month certain."

Then he got up and went away. Nancy waited all day long, but she could not find

an opportunity of speaking to him. Mr. Josef kept away from home, his love was becoming uncontrollable. His mother doated on him as a widow does doat on an only son, and she began to see that something was amiss. She set to work to find out her son's secret; meanwhile Nancy collected her wits and thought the matter over.

On her passage out, she had always received the same answer about returning.

"You can always leave Buenos Ayres a week after you reach it."

The power of action, which had quickened into sudden life on the night of her lonely watch, had not spent itself in her long toilsome journey. Nancy felt that her work had hardly begun, she must not think of rest till she had recovered her darling Miriam.

Timidly shrinking from the answer she

dreaded, she asked Madame Josef if she knew Mr. Brendon's wife; or if she had ever seen her. But the Brazilian knew nothing.

"Mr. Brendon's villa is out of the city," she said; "all I know of him is that he is a rich merchant."

Mr. Josef re-appeared next morning, and Nancy found his manner still more puzzling.

She shrank from him, and went to her room earlier than usual — troubled and uneasy.

Just as she had lain down in bed, there came a tap at the door. It was Madame Josef. She looked flushed with anger.

"Do you really wish to go back to England, Miss Blane? if you do, you can go in a day or two."

Nancy started up in bed: "Has your son found out a ship? Oh, Madame, I

can never thank you both enough for your goodness; I must thank him to-morrow."

"You must do nothing of the kind;" Madame Josef's look made Nancy blush and shrink down into bed again. "I have a bargain to make with you, young woman. My son is ill, troubled in his mind, and he must be in peace; our house is too small to permit this unless you keep to your room. If you promise me to stay here quietly, I will secure your passage and make the necessary arrangements."

Nancy listened in simple wonder; the request seemed so small, and the favour conferred so great, her mind was so troubled that she never guessed at the mother's perplexity. She kept her room a few days, suffered tortures of anxiety and impatience, while Mr. Josef believed her

to be seriously ill. His mother had to listen to the confession of his love for the English girl, but she did this cheerfully; her quick perception told her that she had nothing to fear from Nancy. At last all was arranged; Nancy asked to say good-by to Mr. Josef, but Madame only shook her head. "It is impossible, Miss Blane." But when she bade Nancy farewell on the deck of the homeward-bound vessel, she shook her hand warmly.

"Don't thank me," she said; "you make me feel dishonest; my son loves you. If you had stayed he would have married you, though you are a heretic. You could not have said No to my Josef and I—he is all I have," she said, "and if he takes a wife I lose him."

Amid the anxious thoughts of her voyage home, Nancy often smiled over the heated, exaggerated fancy which had

led Mr. Josef's mother to plan and enact this little drama, instead of letting things take their course quietly.

"Poor woman, if she had only known!" and then Nancy sighed at her own hopes. Hopes, it was mockery to call them by that name; all the freshness had faded out of them, they were like leafless branches. Where was Miriam? "How shall I ever find her if Mr. Brendon hides her away from me?" and then Nancy thought of a poem she had read, where the heroine wanders up and down the earth till she grows old—seeking, always seeking, and at last meets once again the love of her youth; a grey, sorrow-worn, dying man. And then as we often weep more easily at the images by which we illustrate our griefs than at the griefs themselves, Nancy paced the quiet corner of the deck she had chosen for her walk, and the tears fell

silently down her cheeks, not for herself so much as for Robert.

"Oh, it is too hard on him, too hard; I have been wilful and headstrong often, I am learning that more and more, and I used to be jealous, too, of poor darling Miriam. But he has done nothing, he is so true—so good; oh, why is his life to be wasted? and yet God is good; he does not make people to make them unhappy." And so she went on puzzling over the old question which is so puzzling, which can never be solved on earth.

"It is because misery will be fully made up to us in Heaven," the girl thought, "that we shrink from having all according to our own will here; and yet, when sorrow really comes, we want it taken away—one is so different to that which one thinks oneself beforehand."

Nancy had told herself she would never

marry Robert so long as Miriam was living a life of shame.

Would Miriam leave the man she considered her husband? Nancy tried to recall a vivid image of her sister, and as all the years of childhood and girlhood passed by in memory, she could not summon up one instance in which Miriam had given up to her judgment.

"But she was always good, always right, and I was always in disgrace and trouble."

And then Nancy shrank back from what seemed almost like a temptation of pride. Was she indeed appointed to show Miriam her error?

"I did not appoint myself," she said quietly, after a while; "Father's illness was sent him, and I did not go willingly because—because of Robert; and if I go on looking for guidance I don't believe I shall be let go wrong."

And yet, spite of her faith, poor Nancy's heart was sorely wrung at the judgment Robert might pass on her journey.

"Maybe I'll be the first to tell him I've been away. Rizpah's not got so many friends, and I doubt if any one of the folk she talks to would have dealings with the Purtons."

But this hope could not find a foundation. Mr. Purton rarely left Shallerton, and if he met her father and questioned him, Matthew would be like enough to tell of his daughter's journey.

"Miriam's a nine-days' wonder yet in Shallerton, I don't doubt," and Nancy hung her head in anguish at the thought; "we'll have to leave the cottage and go somewhere else; it would break her heart to be looked at and whispered about."

The old pride of Nancy's nature rose in

defiance. What right had people to scorn her innocent deceived sister?

Her father had a large share in Nancy's thoughts; it seemed almost beyond her power to break her news to him; to face him without his lost darling.

Her heart beat faster as she drew nearer the end of her journey, and when she at last reached Shallerton Nancy felt like a criminal. She left her luggage at the station and walked quickly through the town and down the slope which led to the cottage. Her father's patient gentleness would submit after the first to this new blow, —but it was just this first meeting that she dreaded — this telling how all had come about. Deep feeling always tied her tongue.

"It's all been ordered for the best," she said, and then she opened the garden gate, "and if we strive to do right we must go right enough."

She softly opened the house-door. Matthew Blane sat in his high-backed chair, his eyes shaded with his hand, his whole figure sunk and crushed.

Everything looked so unchanged that Nancy found it difficult to think she had been away so many weeks.

It was growing late, and the corners of the room were indistinct, but there was a little fire in the grate; the light fell on Matthew's pale face, and gave it an unusual tinge of colour.

He started at Nancy's entrance. He got up, trembling from head to foot, and grasped at his chair to steady himself.

All thought of Miriam vanished in the tide of pitying tenderness that overflowed from Nancy's heart.

Her arms were round her father's neck and she was hugging him to her, fondling

him and calling him all the loving names that rose to her lips at once.

Matthew let his head rest on her shoulder, and then he drew a deep sob.

"You have not found her, child?"

The words came from Nancy's lips without the effort she had feared.

"Not this time, father, but, please God, we'll find her yet. God forgive me," she said to herself.

"Where is she, lass? Tell me where I shall find my darling."

He freed himself almost roughly from Nancy's clasp and looked about for his hat and stick.

"I haven't got her direction yet; but she's in England;" Nancy tried to quell the throb in her voice: "I will find her soon, father dear, if God so wills."

"Don't preach, lass." Matthew was excited out of all his usual patience.

"He never willed my lamb to go astray, and He never willed us to sit here, and leave her to that deceiving villain."

The passion in his voice rose—it frightened Nancy, but she spoke quietly.

"Father dear, don't fret yourself; you must sit down. Don't you mind the doctor said you must keep quiet and never speak loud or take on?"

She spoke very gently, and laid her hand firmly on his arm; but there was a woeful helpless feeling at her heart. It was new to her to try to influence him; she had no belief in her own power. But Matthew yielded—subsided at once at her words, and sat down again in his chair.

Nancy waited a minute, and then seeing that he sat there with closed eyes like a child that has exhausted itself by crying, she crept softly upstairs.

"How faithless I was," she thought,

"and how different it might have been if Rizpah had been there, and I'd not been able to tell him my own way. I know, father, he'll not repine now the first burst's over—he'll take it all as it is ordered."

She was so full of feeling for her father —so brimming over with thankfulness for her own safe return, that it did not occur to Nancy that she might have expected a word of thanks or praise—an inquiry for her own welfare—that her father had quite lost all memory of her and her doings in his anxious love for Miriam.

Nancy's childish troubles had rarely arisen from any physical form of selfishness, rather from a certain wilfulness in trying to do kind actions, let the consequences be what they might—Miss Denton, her teacher, had often called her wrong-headed and strong-willed, but Nancy had rarely been called selfish.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW NEWS TRAVELS.

PEOPLE go on wondering in the tritest, stalest fashion why they so often pick up links of the chain that unites the circle in which they live. In some far-off, out-of-the-way place they meet their brother-in-law's cousin's dearest friend; "such an extraordinary coincidence, and we were attracted to each other at once." The sympathy, if real, would have been the same anywhere, only it might never have found its way to the surface in less isolated circumstances; but the point in question is, that these same matter-of-fact people who travel half over Europe,

and remain, so far as regards the inner mental region, as matter-of-fact as they went,—are constantly picking up links in real life, and yet are the first to vote them improbable when they appear in type—quite forgetting that the mere fact of printing a history fails to destroy its reality.

While Nancy Blane that night lay down to rest with an aching heart, her self-reliance sorely humbled by this her failure, one of the links of circumstance was being riveted to the aim she kept before her.

Mr. Purton is sitting in his counting-house later than usual. He has closed work for to-night, but still he has not left his desk. There is a well-satisfied smile on his face; he has, as is his wont, a thumb in each waistcoat pocket—he is in a very happy mood. He has just made a most successful speculation, and a friend who has dipped into the same venture, by

Mr. Purton's advice, has met with success too. A man feels a comfortable security in self-glorification when his sagacity has benefited a friend's pockets at the same time as his own—he can tell himself that he is a good fellow as well as a lucky one—a reflected light from this glory shines now over the rest of Mr. Purton's cares.

"Capital thing for Robert that that affair about the Blane girl should have happened when it did. "Poor things, I'm really sorry for the Blanes, but that engagement was altogether unsuitable—not to be thought of. What is the use of my having sacrificed my life to give Robert the position he may hold if he is to sink all chance of position by a low marriage?" A pause of thought here. "You might as well build a stone mansion, and then patch a brick room on to it." Mr. Purton looks less smoothly content, when his meditation goes on again.

"Yes, I know; Robert says Matthew's father and mine began the world as equals, and, therefore, he and Nancy are equals now —of course that's against common sense. You'd uproot all the distinctions of society if you attempted to enforce such a notion; but then, Robert, poor fellow, his ideas are limited. Very extraordinary—his mother had plenty of ambition. I can't conceive where he took up with these small love-in-a-cottage plans of life."

He felt himself frowning, and he smoothed his brows and tried to look benevolent and forgiving.

"Well, never mind, he's free to make a new choice, and I must go over oftener to Button Court. I'm afraid Robert is not likely to make a good choice for himself. Money's not what I care about. What is money to me now, compared with position? I do want a lady for a daughter-

in-law, and I'll have one. Where should I be now if I'd married Nancy's mother, just because I loved her?"

But this thought seemingly requires distraction. He pulls out his watch. Mr. Purton is getting stouter with age, and his watch-chain has to stand a far more vigorous tug than used to be necessary, even a year ago.

"Marsden must be here soon—he's a good fellow, and I'm glad to have been of service to him, but dear me," and here both thumbs go back again into the waistcoat pockets, "what a different position that man might have been in, if he had only consulted me before. He's too full of himself—a common fault perhaps; still if a man don't take care of himself I should like to know who will; but there's a way of softening everything. Somehow Marsden carries himself more outside than he need, I fancy."

The clerks had gone long ago, and Mr. Purton left his desk at last, and turned off the gas. Instead of crossing the large entrance hall to the dining-room, he opened a side door in his own office; this led into a tiny dressing-room, and on through an opposite door to one of the cosiest snuggeries imaginable.

A small octagon room, wainscoted to the ceiling with oak, with an octagon table in the middle of the room; some dwarf bookshelves, and a few portraits in oil, with black and gold worm-eaten frames. Mr. Purton would not have put these pictures in new frames on any account. He called them "family portraits"—he had picked them up cheap at a country sale in Wales. They were his own, and were probably, as he said, "family portraits." They gave a quaintness and repose to the little room which no amount of modern

glitter could have accomplished, and as their owner looked at them he revelled in an amount of ease and self-possession which he considered solely compatible with ancestral honours.

A splendid log fire blazed in the grate, and Mr. Purton warmed himself before it, and surveyed the appointments of his dinner-table with satisfaction.

Living alone, as he did, he never gave in to the careless bachelor habits which would have been really more congenial. So far as domestic comfort went the man lived in bondage; but then Mr. Purton craved the world's good opinion, and his servants were a part of his world.

Squire Hawkins, the nearest landholder, a needy man, with a large family, did not maintain so much state in his household as the timber-merchant did; and yet, though this state went on every day, Mr. Purton

never lost a sort of conscious enjoyment of it—an enjoyment tinctured with a lasting fidget lest it was not after all quite up to the mark.

Presently the door opened, and Mr. Marsden was announced. There had been no previous sounds of arrival, for this snuggery, designed by Mr. Purton himself, had been so contrived that its quiet could not be disturbed from without.

"Ah, how d'ye do, Marsden: come to the fire, won't you?"

The new comer was tall and slight, with a high-nosed, narrow face, and dark eyes.

"Thanks—no, I'm not cold; I always, you know, suit my costume to the season; the change of temperature yesterday was a warning not lost on me—witness my wraps in the hall."

Mr. Purton fidgeted, and blew his

nose violently; his friend's flippant manner always irritated him at first starting.

"Early days for wraps," he laughed. "Why, I didn't know you were such a coddle, Marsden. Where have you come from to-day?"

"Well, I've come from Sparmouth. By Jove, Purton, that place is waking up; it'll be a stirring town soon; my brother has a thriving business there, let me tell you."

Mr. Marsden was wrathful at being called a "coddle;" but he could not well quarrel with a man to whom he owed such a debt of gratitude as he did just now to Mr. Purton; still it eased him to speak of this brother—a former apprentice of his host's—a young man who had always appeared to Mr. Purton a very dull fellow indeed.

"Ah—got a good foreman. Poor Mike,

I hope he may continue to prosper, but a builder's is the very last business I should have chosen for your brother Michael, Marsden."

"That may be, but greater men than you have made mistakes, my dear fellow; by the way I told Mike I was to sleep here, and he asked me to make an inquiry of you." The door opened and two servants appeared with the dinner, but Mr. Marsden went on speaking. "He wants to know—"

"Hush," Mr. Purton spoke in that tone of rebuke which betrays a certain satisfaction in the fault committed, and his friend looked red and affronted.

The dinner being placed, Mr. Purton told the servants not to wait, and he and his friend were left alone.

"My dear fellow, I was sorry to check you just now," he said, when the servants

had gone away, "but it is so dangerous to discuss private affairs openly. Now I'll hear your brother's message; what is it, poor fellow? I hope he's doing well."

"Don't you waste pity on him, Purton—he's doing capitally. He only told me to ask you if you knew anything of a man named Brendon."

"Brendon?" said Purton, thoughtfully.

"Yes, Brendon—well, I didn't think you would know, and I told Mike so, but he persisted in sending the message. This Brendon has bought a house my brother had to dispose of, and now he's getting a couple of rooms added to it. I fancy Mike does not feel quite sure about his money."

"What does your brother know about Mr. Brendon? Does he say where he comes from, to begin with?" Mr. Purton would have thought it a blemish on his shrewdness if he had asked the question

that suggested itself at the mention of Brendon's name.

"Yes—he has just come from abroad—from the River Plate I believe."

"Ah—is he a family man?"

"Got a wife—a very pretty woman Mike says, much younger than her husband; but there's something unusual about them; he seems to be well off, but they have hired all their servants in Sparmouth, haven't brought one with them, and Mrs. Brendon don't receive visitors. Do you know something about them?"

Mr. Purton hesitated; he wanted to tell the whole story, but then, if Robert persisted in his attachment to Nancy, the scandal must be kept quiet; and though he had a contempt for his son's intellect, he was a little afraid of a certain quiet force of character in the young farmer, a quiet

force to which Mr. Purton gave the name of obstinacy.

"Never saw Mr. Brendon in my life," he said, "only I was just thinking I had heard the name before."

"I'll tell you why Mike thought you'd know something. This Brendon it seems is a connection of some people who used to live hereabouts—people named Llewellyn."

"Ah, indeed." Mr. Purton looked indifferent; he had no motive for this piece of diplomacy, but in his opinion mere simple straightforwardness was only suited to fools, and no opportunity for the exercise of worldly wisdom ought to be neglected. "What sort of connection?"

"Oh, really, I've forgotten." Mr. Marsden laughed, and showed his glittering white teeth; "Mike did tell me the whole pedigree, but I have so much of

real importance, you know, pressing on my brain"—he put his ringed hand to his forehead—"I can't possibly remember all the trifles that occupy you country folks."

"You make a great mistake there, Marsden, a very great mistake; there's nothing so trifling but what it may lead to something of consequence. When I was a lad I remember reading how the cackle of a goose saved Rome, and I never forgot the lesson; those chance outside things one hears often lead to business—a man of business, sir"—Mr. Purton stuffed his hands into his pockets—"can't afford to forget or to overlook anything."

"Ah, my dear fellow, excuse me, that's how you country folks see it. In London, you know, we have more liberty of creed. 'Pon my soul, Purton, I often wonder you never tried your luck in London—you're

wasted down here." Mr. Marsden yawned and pulled out an elaborate cigar-case—"have a cigar."

A flush mounted to Purton's face, but his annoyance only found vent in a stiff politeness of manner and a refusal of Marsden's cigars.

"Thank you, when I do smoke I prefer a pipe."

"Ah, habit, all habit," and Mr. Marsden having by this time lit a cigar, his host was released from the trouble of entertaining him. The words "you're wasted down here" had set him thinking.

If he could have seen his way to such a change without risk—the risk of losing precious time while he established a fresh connection—Purton would have gone to London years ago; but as plants are often kept firm in their places quite as much by a threadlike net-work of fibres as by

any more definite root, so he had never felt himself free to break from the web of circumstances that held him at Shallerton. He had, no doubt, been thrown away in such a narrow sphere, but he had been always sure of his ground. In his own estimation he was like a whale in a fish-pond. There was some impulse in Mr. Purton's character, but no imprudence; he was not avaricious so far as the mere heaping together of money is avarice, but he looked on money as far too valuable and sacred to be trifled with even as a means to something higher; even for the position he so dearly craved, he would not yield an iota of security; so he had stayed and vegetated on at Shallerton.

In this marriage scheme for Robert he saw a way to his object free from risk or expense. Robert would never sacrifice himself for money; his early indifference

[illegible] taught his father that lesson without any risk of mistake; but in persuading his son to marry a wife in a superior station of life to himself there would be great gain without the appearance of greed.

"Dear me, Robert is gentle-mannered enough; he won't take to the separation easily, perhaps; but before he has known a polished, refined woman a twelvemonth, he'll wonder how he ever looked at Nancy Blane."

CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE AND DUTY.

MR. PURTON is very punctilious in fulfilling social duties, and the next morning he stands at the bottom of his door-steps, waving his hand to Mr. Marsden as he drives away.

"Extraordinary disagreeable young man that, he don't improve either, so uppish and pushing. I wonder what there is about London, but it seems to me that the minute a man begins to get on there, he does nothing but advertise his own merits. I can't fancy how people can swallow such humbug."

He went into his office. The small

clerk with a turn-up nose had just been laying a wager as to whether "the governor" would increase his salary at the turn of the year, and he was pitching a halfpenny into the air when his master opened the door. He got a sharp reprimand, and crept up on to his stool very much like a dog in disgrace.

"The governor" had plainly got out of bed wrong foot foremost, and, moreover, instead of going into his own inner den, as he usually did to get rid of his vexations, he stood fuming and fretting, and plunging his hands into his hair till he made himself look like a grey-headed Absalom.

This feat accomplished, he retired into his dressing-room and combed himself into order. The truth was that he did not care to face his own thoughts; it seemed to him that something ought to be done in regard to the news he had heard. It

was his simple duty to tell Matthew Blane where he would find his unfortunate daughter; also it was his duty to tell his son Robert that this scandal had reached England, and was actually asserting its respectability within ten miles of Button Court.

"I must tell them both; it's a mere matter of duty." He was combing his hair before the glass in his dressing-room, and he pulled up his shirt-collar so vigorously that the corners nearly went into his eyes.

He had already told himself this several times, but the real kindness that lay somewhere hidden in his heart writhed at the words, and made him worried and ill at ease.

To-morrow was market day in Shallerton, and Robert came over to market every now and then.

"He'll come to-night, I know he will,

and I must make up my mind what to do before he comes."

It seemed just possible that in an out-of-the-way place like Sparmouth, Godfrey Brendon might escape detection. "After all, if he is making a good husband to the girl, why should any one interfere between them; the first wife, if there is one, and that seems uncertain, may die, and then who need be any the wiser?"

Mr. Purton thought of Nancy and her promise, that so long as her sister stayed with Brendon she would hold herself aloof from Robert.

"She looked as if she meant it, too; and yet I don't know, women are such impulsive creatures, they never forecast the reality of anything, though they'll imagine impossibilities by the cartload. I take it to be quite possible that if Nancy comes back no wiser than she went—and that must

be the case, for she has plainly missed these people—and if she hears no more of this rumour, and it dies away, as it will die away if nothing more comes out; and if Robert perseveres in courting her in his dogged silent way—why she'll marry him; and then what becomes of all my plans for founding a family? Confound her!"—An unusual, angry light burnt in his dark eyes—"She shan't marry him if I can hinder it, and I seldom fail in what I undertake to carry out. Nancy's not a girl to live within ten miles of these Brendons if the scandal gets abroad. I didn't marry the girl I wanted; and why should Robert? Life and position are far too important to be sacrificed to a little love-making."

Mr. Purton tried to throw himself into a correspondence, the result of his new speculation, but he could not concentrate

thought. He took a few turns up and down his office, and then tried to read the paper, but this failed, too, in arresting his attention. That strange prescience—the feeling within us that we know what is going to happen—was strongly upon his mind; and it was a relief, not a surprise, when the small clerk knocked at the door and said that Mr. Robert had arrived.

There was no time for any more perplexity. The clerk stood aside and let the young farmer pass in.

"Why, Robert, is it you, you are here early, arn't you?"

"Yes." Robert hesitated, and then he looked full at his father. "I may go to market to-morrow, or I may not; it wasn't market brought me over." He spoke defiantly, Mr. Purton thought. "I saw Nancy Blane's name in a list of passengers

returned from Buenos Ayres, and I came over to see her."

The glow of welcome faded out of Mr. Purton's eyes—his square chin set itself like stone.

"Have you seen her?"

"No; I've been to the cottage. She arrived there yesterday, but she is out now. I'm going down again in half-an-hour's time." He stopped—the look in his father's face puzzled him; but Mr. Purton sat waiting for him to finish. "I want to be quite open with you, father." There was an effort in the young man's voice that made it almost pathetic. "I've been thinking the matter over ever since that time at Button Court; and I know I can't be happy unless Nancy marries me. I don't say she will. I've not seen her, so I can't tell how she looks at it; but I've made up my mind, so there's no use in

trying to turn me. I'm going to try my chance with her once more. I'll be above board, father, so I've come to tell you."

If Mr. Purton had shared his son's faith in Divine guidance he would probably have said that this was the motive he needed to spur on his purpose of speaking out; but he would have thought such a calling in of religion on the common events of life a profanity — he felt himself suddenly inspired with a virtuous and moral horror of Mr. Brendon's conduct.

"It's fortunate you came; the fact is" —he avoided Robert's eyes—"that I'm glad you have come to me before doing anything decided, because—"

"Understand, father, that I have not come to consult you—my mind's quite made up. If Nancy had been in this morning it would all have been settled."

Mr. Purton blew his nose impatiently.

He knew that he might as well throw himself against a stone wall in hope to break it, as give way to his irritation in words.

"I had not finished speaking." He said this with a quiet dignity that made Robert ashamed of himself. "My object in wishing to see you was not to oppose your wishes. I want to tell you some news that only reached me last night; in fact, I was planning just now when you came in how to communicate it to you with as little delay as I could help."

Robert turned suddenly pale. He thought of Nancy. Were all his presentiments true? and did she, indeed, love some one else? some one more deserving of her than he was; and was this his father's news? But Mr. Purton went on.

"Do you remember some Llewellyns who lived here years ago—they used to

take a good deal of notice of you when you were a lad. Mr. Llewellyn was parson at that church out Dinton way."

"I should think I do remember them. Why, young Mrs. Llewellyn was very kind to me, she used to have me up to read with her the holiday before I was confirmed. I could never forget her."

"Well, when they left here they took a cottage a little way out of Sparmouth. I remember seeing it some years ago; a pretty little place; it's on the road between Sparmouth and your place, I fancy."

"Yes, it is. I only knew lately though that these were the same ladies as our Mrs. Llewellyns. I don't often go home by way of Sparmouth, but I had thoughts of calling one time and asking how they all did."

Mr. Purton was taken aback; he had not given his son credit for so much senti-

ment, or for so much warmth of attachment.

"Quite right if you did," he said, "it's always well to keep up a good connection, but my news was this,—you remember the story I told you of that poor girl Miriam Blane. Who do you suppose has settled down to live—in capital style too—close to these Llewellyns — Miriam and her — well, I suppose you'll hardly call him her husband—however Mr. and Mrs. Brendon they call themselves—really I don't know when I have been so shocked. Nice quiet ladies like the Llewellyns to have a scandal of that kind forced into their very household. It's very sad indeed. This Mr. Brendon, you know, is old Mrs. Llewellyn's son, by her first husband, Captain Brendon. So he's uncle to young Hugh. It's perfectly monstrous, isn't it? You say you remember what a sweet

thorough first-class creature this young Mrs. Llewellyn was. Fancy her being brought into such a scandal. Ah! my dear boy, if you had taken a fancy to a woman like that now."

Robert looked at his father as if he thought him crazy, and then he laughed.

"I'm not quite out of my senses," he said; "be thankful that I've placed my love on a woman who is my superior in as many ways as Nancy is, without going out of my own station; there wouldn't be much happiness, I fancy, in an unequal marriage, father."

"Happiness," Mr. Purton sneered; "my good boy, if we're only sent here to live for ourselves, then happiness is of course the one thing to go in for; but now just look abroad—look no farther than me if you like—do I live for my own happiness, I wonder?"

"Well, I thought you did." Robert spoke simply, for he could not grasp the idea that his father could be at so much trouble about his way of living, unless he took some pleasure out of it.

"Just so. That's because you don't think deeply, my boy. All my life through I have been thinking of you and of your ultimate position in the world. You're a fine-looking fellow, Robert, and if you choose to throw up farming and take my advice you may step into as good a position as a man need have. You may be sole master very soon, and then I could perhaps live a little for what you call happiness. However I never have lived for myself, and I don't think it would suit me to try. But, my dear boy, we're talking wide of the mark, you don't seem to take this Brendon business to heart as I do."

"It is only necessary for the poor girl

to know the truth," said Robert, "and then she'll go home again, of course."

"But how is she to know the truth? that's where it is. You may depend Mr. Brendon is wide-awake enough to keep her away from her own people, especially if he gets wind of the other girl's journey to Buenos Ayres."

Robert flushed up—

"That is more than we can tell. Do you know whether this is known at the Blane's cottage?"

"Not likely. I was thinking of going down to tell Blane what I had heard. I'll go now with you. We may as well go together." He got his hat and coat and then went back to his son and laid his hand on his arm. "You must see, my dear boy, that until this scandal is set at rest, you cannot pledge yourself to Nancy Blane."

No answer. Mr. Purton could not tell how his son had taken his news; he was not frank himself, but then he always tried to seem candid. This impenetrable silence made him long to knock Robert's head against the wall.

"If you're coming, father, you'd better come," the young man said sulkily, "I'm going to the cottage at once."

CHAPTER XX.

A HARD FIGHT.

RIZPAH stood on tiptoe, her head thrown back over her broad round shoulders, and her short red spherical arms labouring to place one of Matthew Blane's freshly washed shirts on the clothes-line which stretched above her head, from one side of the garden to the other.

Her face, puckered with the strain, was towards the gate, and she gave a start at sight of Mr. Purton and his son—it seemed as if she were fated to be surprised by "they Purtons."

She popped the shirt down on a currant-bush, suppressed an exclamation, and went

towards the gate, wiping her arms on her blue apron.

She only nodded to Robert: she had seen him once before this morning, but she looked up reverentially in Mr. Purton's face and dropped him a deep curtsey; the richest householder in Shallerton possessed tangible attributes of worship—his sleek broadcloth, and massive gold chain with hanging seals, his shining, well-brushed hat, all claimed her respect. "Young Purton" went about in grey tweed, hat and all to match—no show about him.

"Is Blane in?" Mr. Purton gave Rizpah a condescending nod.

Robert's eyes travelled on to the door and he saw Nancy standing just within the cottage.

She stood quite still, she could not move forward and she would not yield to the impulse which prompted her to run upstairs

and hide herself at the sight of Mr. Purton standing beside his son.

Nancy had gone out early and had only just come in, she had not heard that Robert had been to the cottage. It seemed so strange that he should come to see her in his father's company—all her pride was in arms as she thought of her last meeting with Mr. Purton.

"Matthew's out, sir;" and then Rizpah, too, saw Nancy in the door-way and was vexed that she did not come forward to welcome this distinguished visitor.

"Ah, out is he?" The timber-merchant saw Rizpah's reproachful glance at her niece. "Good-morning," he nodded, "glad to see you back again, Miss Nancy; I'm afraid you have had a fruitless journey, eh, isn't it so?"

In speaking to inferiors or of his own benevolence towards them, Mr. Purton

had a way of rolling out his words in a clear resonant voice, finishing each to the last letter, and he was at this moment quite as audible to passers-by in the road behind him as to Nancy.

The girl's face flushed—

"Come indoors, please," she said coldly, and stood aside to let them pass into the little parlour.

Mr. Purton shook hands with her, and then he turned away abruptly and scrutinized everything the room contained. Robert and Nancy stood side by side, their hands locked in one of those fervent clasps which go to the heart as words do to the ear. They were so happy and each at that instant believed in the other's love.

"Sit down, please," Nancy spoke to Mr. Purton.

He cleared his throat with emphasis and took possession of Matthew's wooden

chair; he felt like a county magistrate, master of the situation. The lovers stood still, Robert near the door and Nancy midway between him and his father.

"My dear Miss Nancy," Mr. Purton gave a slight flourish with his right hand as if to mark the paragraph "important." "I have come down here this morning to communicate to your father a—a—somewhat painful piece of news. I will tell it to you instead, if you please; hadn't you better sit down?" he pointed to the chair nearest him.

Nancy gave him a bright flashing look out of her grey eyes—

"No, thank you, I'd rather stand."

Her voice was harsh and her manner ungracious; the old high spirit of childhood rose against Mr. Purton's presence, it was an outrage—an intolerable persecution.

She had hardly known till now how she

had hungered for this chance of explaining her conduct to Robert; he must be nothing to her hereafter, he must go his way and she must go hers, for the thought of Miriam's disgrace seemed to take shape and come between them; but to feel him standing beside her, so close, yet so far off; to long so ardently to justify herself in his eyes, for love taught Nancy that Robert's silence had been caused by doubt or displeasure; to long so for this, and yet to feel no power to speak in his father's presence, maddened her. Robert would go away—she would never, never once in all her life have the chance of telling how she had valued his love and what it cost her to yield it.

There are no far-off possibilities in such a moment, the present is all we have; the tide of passionate love in its burning desire to make atonement for even fancied wrong

suffered by the beloved one sweeps us on till every obstacle that hinders our direct purpose, however slight, is drifted aside or overwhelmed. And to a woman this sometimes comes so suddenly, with so little warning, is in such vivid contrast to the quiet order of her life, that she startles from it like a frightened horse, and is utterly unable to recognize the curb which self-control vainly strives to make her feel.

Robert's sad eyes and changed worn face had thrown light on all Nancy's misgivings about her conduct towards him.

In that brief minute she accused herself of prudish selfishness. To save her own petty scruples, she had left him without one word to explain either her father's sudden interference or her own journey, and the girl's large tender heart gave itself up to the passion which lay there in hiding,

gave itself up, but, alas, found no power to reveal its love. Why is it we vainly ask a question that has been doing its daily work since men and women loved? Why is it that love which has such sympathetic, even such magnetic properties, fails sometimes at the outset to comprehend the signs of its own presence in the beloved one. Nancy's unnatural calm, her harsh tone, sounded his doom to her lover.

"No, thank you, I'd rather stand," spoken without one softening glance towards him. It was plain that she looked on him as an unwelcome intruder.

"What a rude unmannerly girl," thought Mr. Purton. "Oh, dear, how blind Robert is!" But he spoke to Nancy in his rolling patronizing way, without the least shade of visible vexation. "I wish I could have seen your father, Miss Nancy, but perhaps, after all, it's just as well—better, I think

on the whole, better." Here his voice fell into its natural sharp tone. "I heard news of your sister last night and I came off at once to tell you."

Robert was too deeply absorbed in Nancy to listen to his father, and now the sudden softening of expression, the way in which she turned from him, almost bending over Mr. Purton, was fresh proof of her want of love. He knew that his father was talking of Miriam, but what then if Nancy really loved him? Would Miriam weigh in the balance between them? Why, what was his father, or anything he had ever loved in the world to Robert, compared with Nancy? if he had Nancy and her love he would go to the other end of the earth and give up all else. She was all he wanted.

"Do you mean that Miriam is in

Shallerton?" The throb in her voice touched Purton.

"No, oh! no, by no means; but I know where she is—all about her in fact." And then slowly and deliberately he repeated Marsden's information.

At first he kept a steady gaze upon his listener, but such an agony of sorrow came into the dark eyes and the parted imploring lips, that he fidgeted. He had made up his mind to spare Nancy the home-thrust conveyed in Marsden's words, that Mrs. Brendon did not receive visitors; but the girl's ungracious reception, or else the dear delight of giving pain, which, with all his good-heartedness, was not an infrequent recreation of Mr. Purton's, urged those words out of him. He turned away though as he spoke them; he had grace enough to be content with the pain he saw already in

the glowing eloquent face so near his own.

"Thank God. Oh! thank God, then she's not quite changed from ourselves. We can make her happy with us yet."

The fervent burst startled Mr. Purton out of all his self-complacency; it was so totally unexpected.

"Bless my soul!" and then he recovered himself. "Yes, yes, of course—happy, why not?—we're all of us happy when we're doing our duty, and your sister can't be doing hers while she remains with Mr. Brendon."

But Mr. Purton checked himself—if Miriam left the man she called her husband—there would be no obstacle between Robert and Nancy. He was so troubled that he sent his hands through his hair, quite forgetting that he was not alone. "Still, it's very doubtful," he said to himself,

"whether Godfrey Brendon will let the girl leave him so soon; and from what Marsden said, he's just the man to go any lengths if he's thwarted and interfered with." He looked up at Nancy: "Now how do you mean to act, Miss Nancy?"

The girl started in her turn. She was asking herself the same question, and her antagonism to Mr. Purton made her decision rapid.

"I can't tell, sir, till you tell me where I shall find my sister, and how I shall get to her."

Nancy had turned so as to hide her face from Robert. It was hard enough to speak of this shame at all.

"Your best way is to walk to Dinton and then take train to Sparmouth. You'll have a smartish walk after that, but you can't mistake the way; you've only to keep the left-hand side of the river and go

along till you come to Mrs. Llewellyn's cottage."

"I don't want Mrs. Llewellyn," Nancy said bluntly, "I want to find my sister."

"Dear me," her blunt manner disturbed him,—awkward unsensitive men are apt to be singularly keen about any female roughness. "Don't you see, my girl, that the one thing lies within the other? I can't exactly say where Mr. Brendon's house is, but Mrs. Llewellyn will of course tell you all you want to know; very likely she'll go there with you."

A vision of the stately lady she had heard Rizpah describe rose before Nancy. Did Mr. Purton really think she was going to betray her sister's secret to the mother of the man who had so wronged Miriam? Nancy's only hope was that which had gone with her to Brazil, and which had never since left her. She must

get to see Miriam alone and take her away at once so secretly that Mr. Brendon should never trace or follow her.

"You don't understand me, sir. I couldn't tell anything to Mrs. Llewellyn, and I shall be obliged to you, and so will father, if you'll keep this last news you've heard to yourself. I am not thinking of bringing Miriam home to Shallerton; she couldn't bear it — she stopped and tried to steady her quivering lips. "Father wouldn't like it."

Purton felt uneasy; this was not the sort of thing he had brought Robert here to listen to; if Miriam's presence was to be hushed up in the way Nancy contemplated, what became of the disgrace? He was not afraid of Nancy's influence upon his son so long as she gave those ungracious answers; but as she stood now with a warm glow on her pale clear

tion, and her dark bright eyes swimming with emotion, she was dangerously attractive.

"Confound the girl, there's no making her out. She's always turning up different to what one expects."

He had chosen an unlucky moment for reflection.

All this while Robert had stood still, half unwilling, half unable to speak at Nancy's last words. He went close up to her.

"Nancy, will you bring your sister to Button Court? There she will be safe and secret, too — even from Mr. Brendon."

Nancy turned round at his first words; the flush in her cheeks deepened, and then rose, suffusing her whole face; so much as showed of her white round throat, above the frill of her gown, grew rosy; but she

was dumb, tongue-tied—she could not say even "thank you."

Her silence gave Robert courage; if he remembered his father's presence it only served to spur him on to fresh ardour.

"Last time I saw you here, Nancy, you said you would be my wife, and I hold you to your words. No one has a right to come between us two, my own love; you'll come to me at once — I know you will. When I am your husband I shall be Miriam's brother, and I shall have a right to protect her." He took both her hands in his.

The room and all that is in it fades out of Nancy's sight; that exquisite unutterable joy—the joy that makes us conscious only of the presence of love, rushes in full tide over her; she forgets Mr. Purton, Miriam, all but Robert,—next minute she will be in his arms.

Mr. Purton has grown white with anger and fear, but his will is stronger than either. He feels without realizing that he is the only self-possessed actor in the scene, and it behoves him not to lose this advantage if he does not mean to play Nancy's game for her.

He is close to the lovers before she can answer.

"I think you are mistaken, my dear boy. I can't think Nancy told you one thing and me another."

He is close to Nancy, and looks coolly, almost mockingly, into her eyes.

It is trying to be looked at when one is conscious of a tell-tale blush; but if there is a spark of pride in a woman's nature it swells up into a torrent of flame at such a glance as Mr. Purton's. Nancy's soul was torn with pain, unnerved by deep delicious tenderness: it was a moment

of crisis for good or evil, love or pride.

She drew a deep breath; she had almost cried out at Mr. Purton's words, but she conquered the impulse, her pride conquered.

"You need not remind me, sir;" she raised her eyes so proudly to Mr. Purton's that he shrank into himself at once; in that minute he forgot all his superiority, and all Nancy's want of manner. "I say again to your son what I said to you weeks ago—I won't take shame with me to any man's door."

"But, Nancy"—Robert took her hand. She drew it away hastily; she could not help it; her woman's nature was so sorely wounded that she could not endure even the touch of her lover. "Nancy, do listen," he went on,—"no shame can fall to Miriam if she leaves this villain; until she knows the truth she is innocent of all blame."

"Don't, please, don't. I can't listen!" She stopped, and the poor bleeding heart shrank from further temptation to go from what seemed her duty. "If I had seen you sooner I would have told you this myself: there can be nothing more between you and me, Robert. I wish I had written it to you long ago—I ought to have written. We'd best part now."

Mr. Purton had left off watching Nancy. His eyes were fixed on his son's face, and the expression he saw there satisfied him.

Robert's passion had carried him far out of his habitual reserve; he had been for him eloquent; and the reaction left him colder, more silent than ever.

Nancy's love seemed to him a prize far beyond him. He had had so little taste of possessing it that he could not believe it had ever been his. He loved

her with all the strength of his honest manly heart, but she was a sealed book to him. In her constrained manner, in her silence, in her few wrung-out words, he only read a wish to be free from his importunity; even the sorrow in her face, was misconstrued into a pity for his suffering, which she would not have been able to feel if she had loved him.

"Miriam is the excuse," he said, with a bitterness that was as much contempt against himself as anger with Nancy.

Her heart grew heavier, the fight seemed too hard. Must she let Robert go away in the belief that she did not love him? Might she not just once put her arms round him, and tell him heart to heart that she had never loved—never could love any one but him?—and then her eyes rested on Mr. Purton's calm sneering face. How could she do this before his father,

and why should she do it? It would be utterly selfish, for a moment of exquisite joy to herself, she would make the future far harder to Robert.

She saw and felt that Mr. Purton would look on Miriam's disgrace as life-long, would never willingly receive herself as his son's wife, and pride again swept over the passionate yearning at her heart.

"He shall never have power to despise me." She looked up proudly, but she did not trust herself to look at Robert.

"I cannot give you a different answer," she said. "I thank you very much for your kind offer for my poor sister. It is best for you and me that our ways should be separate."

It was such agony to say this that she fancied it must be right. Was not the wrong path always the pleasantest?

"You are a very sensible person, I'm

sure," Mr. Purton struck in suddenly before Robert could speak; "you take the only reasonable view that can be taken under the circumstances, and I'm sure anything I can do to serve you or your father, or——" he made a gulp, for he thought he was really making an offer worth consideration, "or your poor sister even, I shall be most happy to do, in the way of advice, you know, or,"—he put his hand in his pocket by a sort of instinct, "in a more solid way."

He pointed this sentence with a half wink. Mr. Purton did not mean to be jocose, but when he held out his hand to Nancy, she felt a strange longing to fling it and its owner violently from her, and escape upstairs.

Robert had gone out into the porch. Nancy came there after him.

"Good-by," she said.

Her voice was hard and constrained; they shook hands—such a change from that fervent clasp of half-an-hour ago—at one step it was the change from glowing August to chill December.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN OLD FRIEND.

It is not possible to determine happiness, it is far easier to define pain, always presupposing a fixed period of human existence.

A young woman at eighteen will suffer a sort of agony because her milliner fails to send the dress she has been expecting for some special ball, and a middle-aged man of business will suffer about the same amount of mental torture if he misses his train. Outward circumstance and inward temperament have such an endless power of producing difference of effect, that after all the question of definition is a perplexed

one. But limit the period, and then it may perhaps be said that from twenty to twenty-five there is no grief so torturing, no agony so insufferable as this that had come to Robert Purton.

He had counted, built on, twined his existence round the certainty of Nancy's love, and it was not his. Worse still, he thought it never had been his. If Nancy had loved him she had not had time to change before she got his first letter. At one time he had cherished a doubt that his letters had never reached her; but her own words struck this hope away. "I wish I had written," she had said, and in his anguish the young man told himself that a modest girl like Nancy Blane would not write to a man she did not love unless to answer his letters.

Robert could not pitch on a rival; he would not wrong Nancy by supposing she

preferred a rough half-educated fellow like Daniel to himself, so he decided that she was cold.

He had always known she was too good for him, and he told himself irritably that he was a fool to have fancied he was likely to win a girl difficult to be won by any one.

"She's too good in all ways," he said, bitterly, "and there's too little of a woman about her; duty will always go before love with Nancy."

He left his father before they reached the High Street, almost for the first time he spoke out to him unreservedly.

"Good-by, father, you'll not take it unkind that I don't come back with you. I'm upset, that's the fact, and I'll go home Dinton way."

Mr. Purton's heart smote him for the sense of relief he had been enjoying. He

felt something like a school-boy with another fellow's plum-cake.

"Well, good-by, my boy,—it's a bad business, but keep up"—his bright dark eyes glistened, and he griped his son's hand in his small nervous clasp.

"Poor old chap," he said, after they had parted, "after all it's only like a dose of medicine, bitter at first; but it leaves a fresh healthy feel on the tongue. Robert will be twice the man he's been lately, and I must cast about for a more suitable wife for him. Nancy Blane isn't the one for him, that's clear; there's no style or pretension about the girl at all, and now-a-days a woman must have a certain amount of airs and graces, or she'll get held cheap."

When Robert reached Sparmouth he felt that the walk to Button Court would do him good. It was a keen dry day;

there was an element of bitterness in the wind as it whistled among the trees, banging the branches one against another to test their soundness, and scattering the withered leaves along the path beside the river.

Robert stopped when he came in sight of Mrs. Llewellyn's cottage; he had had no purpose in taking the river-path, except to seek the refuge of movement. But as he looked across the stream the words he had said to his father came back.

Almost without stopping to think he sprang down the bank, and with here a careful step and there a bold adventurous leap from one of the huge grey fragments to the other, he crossed the rocky river-bed, and climbed up the bank just below the criss-cross fence.

Having got there he felt irresolute.

How would it be if questions were asked about the Blanes? it was possible that Miriam's story was known already.

"If it is," he said, sturdily, "it's no business of mine. Nancy told us to keep the matter secret."

Robert looked up. Coming out of the bow window, still clustered with roses, he recognized Mrs. Hugh Llewellyn.

She laughed and nodded, and came forward towards the gate.

"How little changed," thought Robert; "why she looks more lovely than ever."

A longing came over him to pour out all his sorrow, and be comforted by the sweet, almost motherly glance, that had just shone down on him, but he had no time to make any resolutions. Next minute Norah had opened the gate.

"Oh, aunt Norah, do shut the window," came a voice after her, but she did not

hear, she was exchanging greetings with her old pupil.

"You see I knew you," said Norah, triumphantly, "though you were such a boy the last time I saw you; you make me feel quite old, Mr. Purton."

The exertion of crossing the river had brought a glow to Robert's face; his eyes were bright with pleasure; he could scarcely have been known for the pale, sorrow-stricken man who had parted from his father at the way across the common.

"Why, what a tall man you have grown into!" Norah looked at her former pupil as proudly as if she owned some property in him.

Robert gave her a grateful admiring glance. Norah's secluded life had not dulled any of the sparkling courtesy which had always made her so winning to young and old. There was so much frankness

mingled with her grace that her slightest act of courtesy seemed to come from the heart.

She moved towards the house and he followed her; he felt inexpressibly soothed and refreshed; he had not tasted food since he left Button Court that morning, but all sense of weariness was forgotten under Norah's influence.

He felt disappointed when he saw a stranger in the drawing-room; he was too shy to look at her after the first glance, but half the pleasure of meeting with his kind friend was dulled by the presence of this tall fashionable-looking young lady.

It was Clara Montgomery. Norah took no notice of her—she went on questioning Robert about all the Shallerton people she had known. They talked of some who had died, and others who had married; but Norah had not known the Blanes, and

Robert grew more at ease. The sight of Norah, the tone of her voice had taken him back years. By degrees he forgot the tall silent lady in the corner who was studying him over the top of her magazine —he felt more like a boy again, as Memory bridged over the time, than he had been for years.

"You must stay and see Mrs. Llewellyn," said Norah; "and Hugh—you can't think what a great fellow he has grown—they will be here soon; they are only at Mr. Brendon's."

Robert roused out of his day-dream. He had an unpleasant memory of Mrs. Llewellyn, a stern, masculine-looking woman, who would be sure to ask questions about the Blanes.

"And if Nancy's name is mentioned, she would find out everything. No, I'll not run the risk. I know I'm no match for

a strong-minded woman, like old Mrs. Llewellyn; and if she had been quite a good woman, this Brendon would have been less of a villain."

There was nothing weak in Robert Purton: his shyness might give indecision to his manner; and he was often slow in forming an opinion; but once formed, it had all the strength of prejudice. He could admit of no appeal from it, nor see any possibility of change; and, as like the rest of us, he was apt to see the failings of others through a strictly personal medium, it would have been impossible to persuade him out of his firm conviction that Mrs. Llewellyn's son by her first husband was an out-an-out rascal, only fit for transportation—a man who had destroyed the happiness of two women—for the young farmer took for granted that the first wife of Godfrey

Brendon was an unoffending, deserted woman—and who, not content with this, by bringing Miriam to England had utterly blighted Robert's own future life.

For he did not acknowledge to himself that it would have been impossible to win Nancy in the end, if this bar had not come between them; Norah's mention of her brother-in-law, perhaps the consciousness of his near vicinity, turned on Brendon the stream of wrath which had hitherto found no satisfactory object.

"Mrs. Llewellyn will be so pleased to see you."

Robert had sat silent, and Norah felt puzzled by his sudden grave looks. He got up.

"Thank you"—he spoke in a nervous awkward way that made her sorry for his want of self-possession; "but I must be going." He tried to smile. "I have been

here longer than I ought; but I forgot how time went in talking to you, Mrs. Llewellyn."

He had nearly said "ma'am." To Robert, Norah was like something royal —quite other than mere ordinary flesh and blood, though he had a most old-fashioned reverence for all women; his notion being that if men did their duty, and set a good example, women being good by nature would be sure to follow it. Robert had lived out of the world, and far more among the fields and trees than with his fellow men and women.

He went away resolute against Norah's entreaties.

"It is very hard to say No to her," he said, as he re-crossed the river. "One seems almost to be rude in refusing such a sweet gracious woman."

Mrs. Hugh Llewellyn stood at the window watching him; and this time,

instead of grumbling against the cold, Miss Montgomery came out of her corner and looked over her shoulder.

"Who is that, Norah, and why didn't you introduce him?"

Norah smiled.

"Well, I don't know, I might have said who he was of course; but he is not a person you are likely to see again; and —and—he is not exactly in our position in life, Clara."

Clara's handsome lip curled.

"What difference can that make? I'm not going to fall in love with him. I don't belong to the type of young ladies smitten at first sight by a handsome face or a broad pair of shoulders. Don't look shocked, Norah, I could tell you of love with no better foundation than a thick yellow beard; but you don't often see such a good-looking man as this Mr.

Purton; who and what is he—a gardener? He'd make a splendid Claude Melnotte."

"Clara! do you suppose I should shake hands with a gardener, and ask him to stay and have tea. He is a young farmer, very well off; his father is the richest man in Shallerton; he, I believe, wished his son to rise in the world, but my old friend, Robert, has simple tastes, and has the sense to remain in his own station."

"Ah, you did look so like papa when you said that." Clara laughed more heartily as she saw Norah's discomfiture. "Now I should like to send this friend of yours to a good London tailor, and then present him to papa alongside of—of, well —Captain Vavasour, and you would see whether papa would not be taken in. There is a largeness, a repose about this Mr. Purton, worthy of a man"—then

meeting Norah's astonished eyes — "I mean," she said in her usual calm cold way, "that to me there is more dignity in a true manly bearing than in any assumption or position in the world."

"Of course there is. No one likes assumption, but there is quite enough of the levelling principle abroad, Clara, and I think this young man is happier as he is than he would be dragged into a false position."

Norah was amazed at her niece. Her secluded life had fostered her prejudices, and, besides, she thought Clara's interest in such a total stranger very unnecessary.

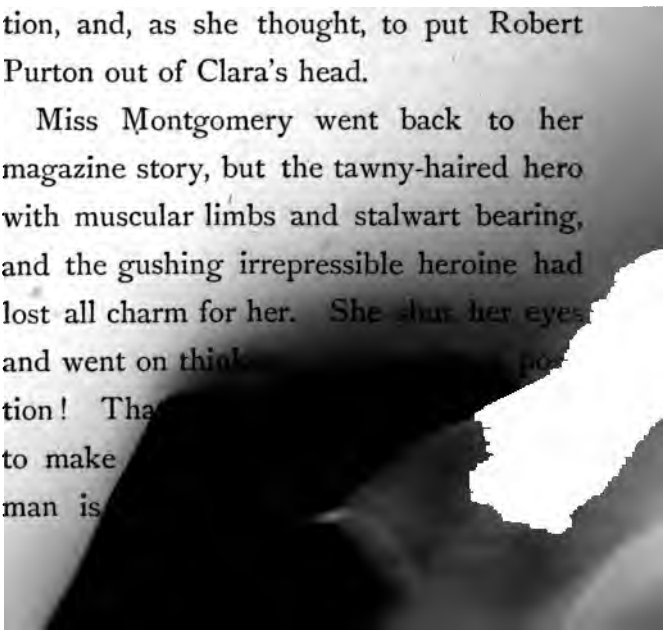
"You called him your pupil. You don't mean to tell me he ever was a parish school-boy?"

"Oh, no; he has been very well educated at Stockport Grammar School. I don't suppose he profited much. I fancy

him an essentially unstudious person; but one holidays he was going to be confirmed, and Hugh took a special interest in him, and asked me to help in his preparation. He used to come to me every day, and I got quite fond of him, though he was rather hard to teach. Dear me, this work is not right after all."

Norah stooped over her work-basket. She was anxious to change the conversation, and, as she thought, to put Robert Purton out of Clara's head.

Miss Montgomery went back to her magazine story, but the tawny-haired hero with muscular limbs and stalwart bearing, and the gushing irrepressible heroine had lost all charm for her. She shut her eyes and went on thi[illegible] po[illegible] tion! Tha[illegible] to make [illegible] man is [illegible]



not be a fit companion for any one? I should like to see Captain Vavasour take a fence alongside of Mr. Purton. I wonder how far off his farm is?"

She leaned back in her chair with half-shut eyes, picturing the tall strong figure making its way beside the river.

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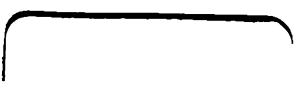
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